

What Does It Mean to Be a Heavenly Citizen? — Philippians 3: 20-21

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture reading: Philippians 3:17-21; Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:35-49
- According to my observation, many Christians are too focused on this life. Their minds are set on things of this life, and they don't think much of the eternal hope, as if now that the ticket to heaven is in hand, all you need now is to live your earthly life well. A famous American pastor who had been pastoring for decades did not really believe in the resurrection until he got pancreatic cancer, and even then he was persuaded by scholars and not the Bible!
- 1 John 3:2-3 shows that eternal hope is the driving force for sanctification. Heaven is not just a medicine you take when sick or suffering for some psychological comfort; heaven is the driving force for a lifetime of sanctification! Whenever you stop longing for heaven and reflecting on the eternal hope, your mind will fall from heaven to the earth and your sanctification progress will be hindered.
- Outline:
 - Title: What Does It Mean to Be a Heavenly Citizen?
 - 1. Pursue Diligently (“For our”)
 - 2. Rejoice Gratefully (“our citizenship is in heaven”)
 - 3. Wait Expectantly (“in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior”)
 - 4. Confess Humbly (“the body of our humble state”)
 - 5. Aim Precisely (“conformity with the body of His glory,”)
 - 6. Trust in the Almighty (“to subject all things to Himself.”)

Pursue Diligently (“For our”)

- “Our”: in comparison to “the many” in verse 18-19 “who set their minds on earthly things”, namely the “enemies of the cross of Christ”.
- “For”: causal relationship, giving reason for the command in verse 17, “join in following my example.” What example? The pursuit in verses 12-16, namely, “forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.” Why should I follow this example? Reasons: 1. Because there are many bad examples around you (verses 18-19); 2. Because we are the true family, citizens of the kingdom of heaven (verses 20-21). We are sojourners on our way home together, cheering each other on as we go!

In other words, don't measure yourself against the lowest possible standards when it comes to spiritual pursuit! Don't fill your life with video games, pop music, soap opera, etc. You say, isn't so-and-so a Christian for years and can still enjoy these things? Paul says, don't be fooled! You are a citizen of heaven and so you should pursue the things of heaven! But so-and-so also

believes in Jesus... Well, whether he is a citizen of heaven I don't know, but I do know there are "many" who "are enemies of the cross of Christ." He may be one of them, or he may be misled by them. But please, true brothers and sisters, don't be misled!

Rejoice Gratefully (“Our citizenship is in heaven”)

- "Our citizenship is in heaven": Like a passport—yours is in heaven! The Philippians had Roman citizenship, a high honor at the time (like American citizenship today). Christians, be sure to know your true identity, your citizenship is in heaven!

American citizenship can be obtained either by birth or by effort. Heavenly citizenship is only by birth - you must be born in heaven!

John 1:13 “Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Galatians 4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

Luke 10:20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.

Wait Expectantly (“In heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior”)

- “Waiting”: not passively waiting, but a proactive attitude. The Greek dictionary says it has two aspects—eager anticipation and patient waiting. On the one hand, I eagerly look forward to it, knowing it is the best thing that I'm waiting for, so I cannot wait to have it; on the other hand, I must wait patiently because I cannot have it now. The timing isn't up to me, so I must wait patiently.

You can call it a spiritual homesickness! Those who have been away for a long time missing their home dearly will do all they can to maintain their home culture, speak home language, cook home dishes, and gather with friends from hometown to talk about their home. However, some people don't feel such homesickness at all. They have been away for a long time and have gotten used to local culture and feel so comfortable that they no longer miss home.

Analogy: In the Old Testament, the Israelites were taken captive to Babylon for 70 years. Then, the dynasty changed, and the king of Persia now allowed them to go back. But, only a few God-fearing people actually returned. Have you become so accustomed to this earthly life that you feel quite comfortable here? Peter says we are "aliens and strangers" (1 Peter 2:11). Are you more like a foreigner in this world, or are you more like a local resident?

Confess Humbly (“the body of our humble state”)

- “The body of our humble state”: Synonyms for “humble state” include low, inferior, base. Know yourself correctly—your body in this life is vile! So don't put too much effort dressing it up...

Humble state does not refer to appearance, but to the corruption of sin. Sin results in the total corruption of human nature—All elements of human nature are stained by sin, from the inside out, from head to toe, nothing is undefiled by sin. The corruption of sin permeates your DNA! (I believe "telomere" is a result of the corruption of sin.) You can't take this lowly body into heaven!

Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Aim Precisely (“conformity with the body of His glory,”)

- “Transform the body”: If you are still alive when Christ returns from heaven, He will instantly change you and sanctify you completely from the inside out. If you are already dead, your final sanctification will take two steps. The first step happens when your body dies and your soul is immediately sanctified to be with the Lord (cf. 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8); and the second step happens when Jesus comes and your body is also raised up in glory, and your glorified body and sanctified soul recombine into a whole you, and that is who you are in heaven eternally!

“conformity with the body of His glory”: “Conformity” means to be of the same form. Not that our outer appearance will be indistinguishable from Jesus, but we will have the same essential attributes in perfect "righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Ephesians 4:24).

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says our present body is perishable, dishonored, weak, and natural; the resurrected body is incorruptible, glorious, strong, and spiritual. The natural/spiritual contrast indicates that now our flesh fights against the Spirit "so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17); but then, our spiritual bodies will no longer fight against the Spirit, and our body will freely submit to all the leading of the Holy Spirit without any hindrance! "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Trust in the Almighty (“to subject all things to Himself”)

- “Subject all things to Himself. “The concept of subjection involves a personification of the inanimate things of creation. The defilement of sin brought not only the total depravity of man, but also chaos and disorder to the whole universe, and the perfect order of the creation was lost. On that day, all things will be subjected to God’s perfect order according to God’s design to show God’s kingship over all (ref: Isaiah 11:6-9). Only the mighty power of God can do this. Trust in him! Fear Him! Praise him!

The word “power” here is the same word as “at work” in 2:13. The power to pursue daily sanctification is the same power by which God will sanctify you fully, and the same power by which He will subject all things to Himself. Christians’ eternal hope is powerful. Does this power manifest in your everyday lives?

In other words, how do you know that you will be fully sanctified? How do you know if your eternal hope is real? You know it because you know the power of God is currently working within you to sanctify you. If not, your faith is useless; it is fake faith.

Summary

The object of our eternal hope is a Person, that is, our “Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (verse 20). The citizens of Heaven are waiting for His coming. He is your Savior; He is your Lord; His name is Jesus; He is the Christ—The king of Heaven. Is He the one you are eagerly waiting for? Does the identity of a heavenly citizen mean all the above things to you?