

“Model Your Citizenship”

Philippians 3:12-21

A few years ago Michelle and I had the opportunity to travel to Israel. When we went to Jerusalem our guide, Reuven, told us that if we have Canadian hats, flags, tee shirts or a bag we're carrying then to wear them for two reasons. 1) We were often in crowded places and that helped him keep track of us, and 2) Canadians were very welcome in Israel and for us to experience the friendliness of the Israelis. And that was very true. We had many Israelis wave at us, say hi, or simply say 'Yeah Canada!'

Why are Canadians so warmly received in Israel (and many other places in the world too)? Generally speaking we have a reputation of being nice, friendly and not trouble makers. What also helped on our trip was that our Prime Minister, Stephen Harper at the time, had just been there 2 months prior. He always had a great love for Israel, and Israel, not having many friends in the International community, welcomed him with open arms.

It's easy to see how people develop an opinion of a group of people (a nation, an ethnic group, an age group or religion) by their positive or negative experience with only one or a few people or even with their leader. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should understand that people should expect that we would be like Jesus. Obviously Jesus hasn't been around for 2000 years so most people's perception of Jesus comes from literature, media, word of mouth and personal encounters with those of us who claim to follow Him. Here in Phil. 3 we see Paul calls us citizens of heaven and explains how we should be modelling who our leader is.

We're focusing on 3:12-21 so once again we find ourselves in an ongoing discourse of following Jesus' example that began in 2:1. There Paul exhorts disciples of Jesus to follow His example of humility, serving and even sacrificing His life for us. Don't compete with one another (a problem he already mentioned was happening around them in 1:15-18) nor think of yourself better than others because of upbringing (he discusses in 3:1-6) and work together (pleading with two ladies in Ch. 4:2) for the sake of those you are. Your citizens of heaven, disciples of Jesus Christ; act like it.

Paul's discussion began with the command to follow Jesus' example in 2:1-18 but he also gives them 3 human examples of believers whose lives are modelled after following Jesus. Timothy in 2:19-24 and Epaphroditus in 2:25-30 and now "finally" 3:1 he says follow my example too. He starts with the command to 'rejoice in the Lord' followed by a 3-times repeated warning of 'beware' those legalists who feel that outward appearances and being Jewish alone is the goal to achieve in life. But Paul, alluding to God's own words to Israel, says circumcise your hearts. God is not looking for outward perfection. If He was, Paul says, I was it! Born of Jewish parents, could trace his line to Benjamin, Law abiding even a Pharisee – and one of the best! – but none of it matters because they don't bring you any closer to Christ.

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of **Christ**. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for **whose** sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may **gain Christ** ⁹ and be found **in him**, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through **faith in Christ**—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to **know Christ** and the power of **his resurrection** and the fellowship of sharing in **his sufferings**, becoming **like him** in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which **Christ Jesus** took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward **in Christ Jesus**.

What is the 'it' or the 'all this' that he's referring to? What's his goal and therefore, what's our goal as a disciple of Jesus? We may be surprised by the answer and readjust not only our theology but the complete direction of our Christian life. That is,

Our Goal is Not a Place, but the Person of Christ **(3:12-16)**

Notice Paul never says in here that he is looking forward to getting to heaven. Instead his goal is:

- surpassing greatness of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**,
- that I may **gain Christ**⁹ and be found **in him**
- a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through **faith in Christ**
- ¹⁰ I want to **know Christ** and the power of **his resurrection** and the fellowship of sharing in **his sufferings**, becoming **like him** in his death, and resurrection

He is looking forward to becoming more like Christ; to become like Him in His death and resurrection. See, earlier in the letter Paul, who was in prison for the gospel, wasn't sure he wanted to survive because "to die is gain" (1:21). He said he was torn between being freed from prison or being freed from his body here. Because if he died he would be "with Christ which is better by far." When you read his struggle in Ch.1 it wasn't between earth and heaven, it was between being with the believers on earth or Jesus in heaven. The goal isn't heaven, the goal is Jesus and Jesus is obviously in heaven with His Father because that's where He dwells in sinless perfection having completed His ministry.

We gain heaven because we gain Christ. God's goal for us is what? To conform us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-30) which Paul reiterates here. He isn't perfectly mature and fully like sinless Jesus yet (which is what he means by 'not having already been made perfect') because he was still on earth. God's goal in saving us isn't to reunite us with our believing family members – that's a great bonus – but its to make us like Jesus, who is perfectly sinless and has a new resurrection body. If your **only goal** in becoming a follower of Jesus is to avoid hell and get to heaven then you've missed the point. That's a great attraction for the unsaved and absolutely true, but getting to heaven is not the goal. Becoming like Jesus is.

Citizens of heaven should look like Jesus (v.12)

Jesus dwells in heaven and if we believe in Christ by faith we will be with Him in heaven when we die. True. But in the meantime, if we're not showing we belong to Jesus, that we are citizens of heaven (which is ruled by our King) then how are we going to attract people to Jesus.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which **Christ Jesus** took hold of me.

What did Jesus 'take hold of' for us? A future hope after we die? Obviously. But most importantly to be with Him and to be like Him. Jesus obtained for us a resurrection body that enables us to live sinlessly and eternally with Him in heaven. How did Jesus obtain this? He had to become

one of us first. And live sinlessly and selflessly and not think of himself higher than He ought but rather

⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

This is why we're to have the same attitude He had. To live sacrificially here which is how we become more like Him. And the more we become like Him the more we show people who our Lord is and that we don't live the way the people of this world live, where our physical passports tell us where we're from, but rather where the Bible says we're really from – heaven, because that's where Jesus is from and lives and will bring us to one day.

This is what Paul presses on for; Christlikeness. We will look more like Jesus

By purposely striving toward Christlikeness (vv.13-14)

Twice he says “I press on” and another ‘straining toward’. ‘Press on’ doesn't have the tenaciousness to the true meaning of the word. It speaks of a zealous, single minded purpose that won't sway from its course. Ironically when this word is used in a negative sense it's used ‘to persecute’. Which Paul used to be at one time.

Paul was saying ‘I don't let up in my pursuit of becoming spiritual mature. To think and act like Jesus. To do as He would do. To care about people the way He does. To humbly sacrifice myself for the needs of others. To point others to God and to seek Him and bring Him glory.

Before, Paul lived for his own glory through his identity as a legalistic Jew. That was all about himself. Now he has to continually work at ‘forgetting what is behind’; to press on ahead to be more like Jesus until he is resurrected with Jesus.

‘Forgetting’ is in the present tense meaning we all like Paul have to constantly stop exalting ourselves. And continually strain forward towards what really matters; becoming like Christ until we ourselves are resurrected too.

This will require a change of mind (vv.15-16)

Our goal is not really heaven – we'll get there because Jesus is there anyway – but our goal is to be like Jesus. That's what a disciple is. The next time you're reading through the gospels notice how often Jesus has to unteach His disciples about the way they were living, following the models of the flawed religious leaders or Roman philosophies. Instead compare what I'm saying with the way the world does things. The challenge then in becoming like Jesus is to think more like Him. Like the first disciples that means listening to Him (in the Word) and talking to Him (in prayer). And then do what He says not just hear what He says.

Paul knew this required a huge mental paradigm shift as he acknowledge in v.15,

“And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

How? By praying for one another to model our citizenship by growing more to be like our Lord and King. To act by His rules and show His love to each other and to a lost world.

¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

We will be conformed to the image of Christ one day so then let's act like we will and show the world our heavenly citizenship where Jesus is our true king. The phrase "citizens of heaven" shows up in v.20. As Paul wraps up his discussion on modelling Jesus, even using spiritually mature examples like Timothy, Epaphroditus and Paul, make sure you do this with fellow citizens. It's now in v.17 he gives us an imperative; a charge to obey:

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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.

We are in this together and need to

Encourage Fellow Citizens in Their Journey to Spiritual Maturity (3:17-21)

Don't do this alone! As Canadian citizens we don't work alone for the betterment of our community and country. How much more so our true home, our eternal family – fellow citizens of heaven, whose King is Jesus? Paul says to follow his example (as well as Timothy, Epaphroditus who followed Jesus). If we do that for each other than we'll

Be an example of Christlikeness (v.17)

'Join with others' infers working together to all be better examples of the Jesus-in-you-life. The Greek word for join is the word we get for mimic – imitate. But here we are to be joint-mimickers. Assisting each other in our pressing on towards Christlikeness. Jesus chose 12 disciples, a group of people who wanted to share God's truths with, to pray with and to share burdens with. Jesus wanted James, Peter and John with Him at Gethsemane. Who did He appear to first after they deserted Him at the cross? His followers.

We need more than just Sunday morning only connections with each other. We need a few people who have the same desire to grow spiritually with together. We need each other as an example, a sounding board, to pray with, to discuss how to live more like Jesus each day.

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

'Take note' doesn't quite give us the strong sense of the word. It has the idea of observe carefully, keep thinking about, watch for those who are growing in Christlikeness. And in your watching you'll also observe those who are not following Christ. Paul warns us about them in vv.18-19;

Don't be distracted by those walking the wrong way (vv.18-19)

Most people live for this world. They are not bad people but they are following a different gospel. A gospel that says, 'Live for yourself, be successful, be all that you can be, climb up the

ladder of worldly success.' Paul calls it like it is; these people are "enemies of the cross of Christ". Why say 'cross of Christ' and not just say Christ? Because the cross is the reminder of the Jesus' way of life. The going down life to serve others and relieve their pain and stress even if it adds pain and stress to your own life. Jesus went to the cross and died, taking our sins upon Himself. Suffering and taking the punishment we deserve. The 'live to serve self life' is an enemy to the gospel; live to serve others' lives.

Join with other's who want to grow in Christ who will help you

Keep God's goal in front of you (vv.20-21)

And Paul gives us three truths we need to remind ourselves of each day so we keep the goal of Christlikeness in mind:

You're already a citizen of heaven (v.20)

But our citizenship is in heaven.

When we accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour we were immediately adopted by the Father and given His indwelling Spirit sealing us for eternity. This is a present tense statement. Faith in Jesus changes my citizenship to heaven even though I still live on earth. We'll see in the coming weeks we are called, aliens, strangers, foreigners in the Bible because this isn't our real home.

As Canadians, when we travel internationally we communicate what Canadians are like wherever we go. Likewise as citizens of heaven. Wherever we go we are always Jesus' disciples; looking forward to the future rewards of our faith somewhere else, and not looking for the earthly rewards that this life has to offer. We are heaven's citizens modelling Jesus to earth's travelers.

Jesus is returning (v.20b)

Jesus' return remind us who's in control of the world. Everyone who lived for this world will find out they made the wrong choice. All of us who chose Jesus will have our faith rewarded. As we strive towards becoming more like Him we are eagerly looking forward to seeing Him put the world under His feet, as God promised. Jesus is also returning to help complete the work God began in making us like Himself.

And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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

Another excellent reminder in helping us to grow spiritually mature is to remember our

Spiritual maturity is assured (v.21)

Earlier Paul stated,

^{1:4} In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

This doesn't mean we have a passive role and let God do it all. Rather, God expects us to do our part as Paul said in Ch. 2:12,

2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

God gives us His Spirit to bring to mind the things we've learned from God's truths so that we will think like Jesus and conform to the way He speaks and acts. We are just scratching the surface today on what it means to be a citizen of heaven. Let's pray that we will learn what it means to make Christlikeness our goal as we develop this further this month and throughout 2022.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
at olivet@rideau.net