**Lesson 12: Citizens of Heaven Living on Earth**

Text: Philippians 3:20-21

**Introduction**

In the last lesson, we considered Paul’s charge to the Philippian believers to follow those who were following Christ (v. 17). There are two reasons given in this text as to why they were to be careful whom they were following. First, Paul knew that they were in danger of following those who would lead them in a wrong way (v. 18-19). Second, as citizens of heaven living in Philippi they were to exemplify Christ (v. 20-21). We will consider this second reason in this lesson. There is a sharp contrast between those who “mind earthly things” and those who have their “conversation in heaven.” If you are a believer, you are a citizen of heaven! Let’s understand how this is a source of joy while living here below.

1. Paul exhorted the Philippians to follow those who are following Christ because of their heavenly citizenship. (v. 20a)
   1. After Philippi came under Roman rule, it was made a colony of Rome.
      1. Thus, the Philippians were colonists. They had Roman citizenship complete with its privileges and responsibilities.
      2. They were ruled by Roman law although they were many miles from Rome.
      3. Roman law ruled their lives even as they lived in a predominately Greek culture.
      4. Paul knew that their political situation would assist in understanding their spiritual situation.
   2. The true homeland of the believer is heaven. (v. 20a)
      1. The word *conversation* refers to the place of one’s citizenship.
      2. “Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome on foreign soil, so the church is a ‘colony of heaven’ on earth.” (Wiersbe)
   3. Warren Wiersbe identifies similarities between their Roman citizenship and their citizenship in heaven.
      1. Their names were registered as citizens. When a baby was born in Philippi it was recorded in Roman legal records. When a sinner is born into God’s family, it is recorded in heaven. There needs to be a record of your citizenship in heaven. ( Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 20:15)
      2. Citizens speak often of their country. Citizens of heaven should be glad to declare the glories of their future homeland and the glory of their King, the Lord Jesus Christ.
      3. The citizens of Philippi where governed by Roman law even though they were several hundred miles away from Rome. They made decisions in Philippi based on their Roman citizenship. We live by the rule of the Son of God in heaven. We should make decisions on earth based on our heavenly citizenship.
      4. They were to be loyal to the country to which they were joined as citizens. We should be loyal to our heavenly citizenship.
   4. Making decisions based on their heavenly citizenship would help them to be spiritually minded.
      1. They were to live differently than those who were focused on earthly things. (v. 19)
      2. “To be spiritually minded simply means to look at earth from heaven’s point of view.” (Wiersbe)
      3. How should this affect your view of possessions, relationships and spiritual service?
2. As citizens of heaven, they were to look for their Lord’s return. (v. 20b)
   1. A highlight for a colony was a visit from their emperor. We look for the coming of the King of kings!
   2. *Look for* means “to await eagerly or expectantly for some future event” (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament).
      1. Paul was not looking for the arrival of the Antichrist or wrath as the next part of God’s agenda.
      2. He was looking for the Lord’s return by way of the rapture. (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18; Tit. 2:13)
   3. When Jesus receives us unto Himself we will be changed. (v. 21a)
      1. *Change* means to transform from one state to another. This is the word from which we derive our word *metamorphosis*.
      2. The word *vile* refers to our lowly condition.
         1. Our body is suited for this world, but not for the next.
         2. We need a body that is not subject to disease, defect, death or decay.
      3. He will change our body to be like His. (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 John 3:2)
   4. This transformation will take place based on God’s supernatural power. (v. 21b)
      1. The same power that is able to transform a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly is able to transform our bodies from corruptible to incorruptible.
      2. Because His working is supernatural, He is able to *subdue* everything under His firm control.
   5. By emphasizing the Lord’s return, Paul encouraged the Philippians to live in the hope of His coming.
   6. “There is tremendous energy in the present power of a future hope….The spiritually minded believer does not live for the things of this world; he anticipates the blessings of the world to come. This does not mean that he ignores or neglects his daily obligations, but it does mean that what he does today is governed by what Christ will do in the future.” (Wiersbe)
3. Central Idea: Paul exhorted the Philippian believers to follow those who were following Christ because they were citizens of heaven living on earth waiting for the Lord’s return.
4. Application: You should follow those who are following Christ because you are a citizen of heaven living on earth waiting for the Lord’s return.
   1. Are you a citizen of heaven? Is your name written in the book of life?
   2. Can others tell that you are a citizen of heaven? Can they tell by your speech? Can they tell by your interests? Can they tell by your loyalty to your homeland? Can they tell by the law of Christ that governs your life?
   3. Do you look forward to the Lord’s return? Too many believers are content living here. We need to return to the place where we are eagerly awaiting His coming.

**Conclusion**

In a world that is plagued with war, disease and immorality, it is a blessing to recall that our citizenship is in heaven. This world is not our home! We are passing through. As we go, let’s allow the joy of our homeland to shine upon our face. Our King is still on the throne! Heaven should have more influence on your life than the earthly culture. Make sure you are following the right examples while you await the coming of our King!