

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Where We Belong Philippians 3:20-21

Intro: Paul has been encouraging the Philippian believers to have a spiritual mind, to put on an attitude of heart that is evidenced by self-effacing love; that seeks to dwell in unity. He uses Jesus Christ as the highest example of this in [ch2](#) but also encourages them to follow his own example of living and serving as he himself follows Jesus. In fact, he encourages all believers to notice the lifestyle of the mature believers the Lord has put in their path and use them as solid, physical examples of how to successfully live the Christian life – not substitutes, but examples.

Paul then goes on to warn the Christians in Philippi against those who profess to be mature believers but whose lifestyle reveals they are actually enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ ([18-19](#)). He lists the characteristics that mark these enemies of the cross; how their end will be destruction – the opposite of what they're striving for; how they are possessed by their own fleshly appetites; how their values are completely reversed from God's values. Of course, the implication of all of this is that we were all in this very position before we came to know Jesus as our Savior. But, since we have come to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation; our character of life, the things we live for – our walk - should now be completely different. The standards and values we had before coming to Christ should be replaced with new values and new standards. These values and standards actually originate from a completely different place.

20 – We should understand how much this statement by Paul would have meant to the believers in Philippi. The city, although it existed in Greece, as a Roman colony – it was an extension of Rome itself. The residents of Philippi greatly valued their Roman citizenship. Just as the Philippians could consider themselves citizens of Rome, subject to Roman law and customs even though they were actually very far from Rome; so too, Christians should consider themselves citizens of heaven. For believers, our true home is in heaven and here on earth we are just a colony of heaven's citizens. Just as the Roman colonist never forgot that they belong to Rome, we must never forget that we are citizens of heaven and our conduct on this earth must match our true citizenship.

If we are citizens of heaven then what does that say about our true status here on earth? We're resident aliens: we're here but we're not from here. Foreigners are distinct – they stand out – in whatever foreign country they go to. You can often tell by the way they look, the way they talk or the things they do. They are unfamiliar with the local customs, social norms and expectations. They really stand out! In the same way, Christians should be so marked by their heavenly citizenship that they are noticed as being different.

There are some general truths that should apply to all resident aliens. 1st, they should strive to represent themselves and their home country properly by doing good things in the land they travel to. Tourists often forget this but resident aliens hang around a lot longer so they have the opportunity to make a longer lasting impression, good or bad. They should also avoid interfering in the affairs of the foreign land they are living in; true citizens tend not to appreciate any foreign interference. Aliens do have privileges and duties but they are not usually under the same obligations as the citizens of that country are. As believers, we are not subject to the elemental principles of this world (Col 2:8, 20). Aliens are not eligible for the same rewards and recognitions as citizens of the land they travel to and they should not focus on building up their own personal empire in that foreign land.

Clearly, the status of resident alien has its limitations in a foreign country but just think of the benefits that come from having your citizenship in heaven. As citizens, we are under the government of heaven. Just let that truth sink in. As Americans, we used to chuckle at the way other governments ran their countries. Well we have no room to talk anymore. What a relief it is to know that our true home, our heavenly country is governed by an all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving God whose administration is merciful and full of grace towards its citizens. Also, we will share in heaven's honors. You may never be "honored" here on earth but you will be honored where it matters, by One who matters most. As citizens of heaven, we have property rights in heaven; we can enjoy the pleasures of heaven; we love heaven because we have a spiritual attachment to it. Finally, as heavenly citizens, we have both the privilege and responsibility to stay in communication with our heavenly home.

These are the benefits of being a citizen of heaven but what does it actually mean? What are the ramifications and responsibilities associated with our heavenly citizenship? First, to be a citizen of heaven means your name is listed on heaven's record. The Philippian citizen was privileged to be a Roman citizen away from Rome. When a baby was born in Philippi, it was important that its name be registered in the legal records of the city. When a lost sinner accepts Jesus Christ and becomes a citizen of heaven, their name is written down in the Book of Life (4:3).

I have always been told that my maternal grandfather's mother was either full-blood Cherokee or half; which would make me and my siblings and maternal cousins all 8th or 16th part Cherokee. How does that apply to this? Well, that would still be enough to be eligible for all native-American benefits from the government. Did any of us receive any of those benefits? No, because my great-grandmother's name was never found on any of the tribal registers. No name, no proof of citizenship. Citizenship is important so having your name on the register is a critical point.

The Christian's name is written in the Book of Life and this is ultimately what determines your final entrance into the heavenly country (Rev 20:15). When you confess Christ on earth, He will, in turn, confess your name in heaven (Mt 10:32). Your name is then written down in heaven's register (Lk 10:20) and it stands written forever. Because we've trusted Christ, our names are written down and we'll enter glory on the merits of His grace and intercession alone.

Second, as citizens of heaven we should speak heaven's language. Those who mind earthly things talk about earthly things exclusively. What comes out of the mouth reveals what's in the heart. The unsaved person doesn't understand the things of God so how can he talk about them intelligently; why would he talk about them. The citizens of heaven not only understand spiritual things, they also enjoy discussing them and sharing them with one another. After all, we're discussing things that concern our homeland (1 Jn 4:5-6).

But, speaking heaven's language not only involves what we say but also the way we say it. The believer should always be careful to speak in a way that glorifies God (Col 4:6). Why salt? Salt prevents corruption! Let's face it, things don't always go right in our lives and the way we respond to these difficulties is a reflection of our faith and trust in God. How do we respond?

Do we complain? Do we realize that constant negative complaining shows either a lack of knowledge in God's sovereignty over our lives or a lack of trust; either position is wrong for a believer because it confuses the unbelievers around us, which is the opposite of what we are called to do (Eph 4:29).

Next, as citizens of heaven, we obey heaven's laws and are loyal to heaven's cause. We have a responsibility to obey the laws of the land that we currently live in: that's both biblical and smart. As believers, we have enough trouble in this life without going around asking for more. Still, we need to remember that while the laws of heaven do not replace the laws of our resident country, they do supercede them. That means we are to obey the laws of the land up to and until they contradict or attempt to out-right usurp the laws of heaven (Acts 4:19-20).

Paul has just warns the Philippians against imitating the wrong kind of citizen (17). Instead, he told them to follow the example of him and those who were mature in the faith. Paul's life was governed by the laws of heaven and this is what made him different. He was concerned about others, not himself. He was interested in giving, not getting. His motive for serving was love for Christ, not recognition or personal honor. Paul obeyed God's Word by faith, trusting that it would always stand true and never let him down. Sadly, there were plenty of people in Paul's day that claimed to be citizens of heaven but their lives did not reflect that status. Even though they may have been zealous in their religious activities or serious in their disciplines, there was no evidence of the control of God's Spirit over their lives. The same tragedy is no less evident in our day and age, maybe even worse!

Finally, as citizens of heaven, we should be looking for heaven's Lord. Can you imagine what would have happened in Philippi if it were announced that the Emperor of Rome himself would be visiting their city? The place would go crazy with preparation and anticipation that would only get stronger as the day grew closer. The closest modern example of this is when the Pope goes on tour or a city is awarded the Olympic Games. And just as any resident of Philippi would eagerly await a visit from the Roman Emperor, even more so should Christians eagerly await and anticipate the promised coming of their King – Jesus Christ, the King of kings!

The 3 most important doctrines of the early church concerned the cross of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the eventual return of Christ. The cross was of the utmost importance because the death of Jesus was the heart of the gospel. The resurrection was equally as important because it was the undeniable evidence of the truth of all Christ's claims. But the return of Christ was also important because this was the blessed hope of the early Christians. It's what they prayed for, what they expected; what they comforted each other with in the face of sorrows, persecutions, death and even martyrdom. We can imagine that as they lay in prison, suffering and tormented, often near death, they looked for His coming and thought that maybe in an instant and without warning Jesus would appear and call them home. It was what they longed for – it was the reward that they anticipated the most – just to be with Him.

More specifically, in our text, Paul is combating the false doctrine of the Judaizers and part of their problem was that they were living in the past. They were attempting to get the Philippian believers to go back to Moses and the Law. But the true Christian lives in the future tense, anticipating the return of their Savior. As resident aliens of earth, Paul is giving us a new vision – waiting for our Savior! It's this anticipation of the coming Christ that motivates the believer with the mature spiritual mind.

There is a tremendous amount of energy in the present power of a future hope. Because Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God, he was content to live in a tent. Because Moses looked for the rewards of heaven, he was willing to forgo the treasures of this earth. Because of the joy that was set before Him, Jesus was willing to endure the suffering and shame of the cross. The fact that Jesus Christ is coming back for His people is a powerful motivation for dedicated living and devoted service *today* (1 Jn 3:3)!

Citizens of heaven, living as resident aliens on earth, should never be discouraged or despondent because we know that our Lord is going to return one day. We should faithfully continue to do what He has saved us and called us to do (or at least start) because we don't want Him to return and find us being disobedient. The spiritually minded believer doesn't live for the things of this world; he anticipates the blessings of the world to come. This doesn't mean that we should ignore or even neglect our daily responsibilities; but it does mean that what we do today should be governed

by what Jesus Christ will do in the future. Heavenly citizenship does come with some hefty responsibilities but it also come with some wonderful and eternal benefits

20 – I mentioned before that the resurrection of Christ served as evidence to all of His claims. But, it also serves as proof for many other things. It proves that His sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to win our salvation (Rom 1:4). It proves our justification before God as we accept His salvation (Rom 4:25). It proves that we can have supernatural victory over sin in this life because Jesus lives to provide the power for that victory (Heb 7:25, Jude 24). It also provides the unshakable evidence for our own resurrection. The resurrection means Jesus is alive and because He lives, we will also live and, more importantly, because He was transformed, we'll also be transformed. Jesus wasn't just resuscitated from the dead in the same body He had when He walked this earth. No, He was resurrected in a new body – a glorified body – one that was patterned after the old body but equipped and fitted for heaven!

The Bible teaches that when we see Christ, “we will be like Him” we will receive a glorified body. Paul discusses this at length in **II Cor 5**. He talks about the destruction of our earthly home (or tent). This is very appropriate considering the temporary status of our physical bodies. He says that when this temporary dwelling place is destroyed, God will give us a “house” not made with hands, one that is eternal in the heavens: one that's made for the environment of eternity. It's quite possible that this is the place – or mansion – that Jesus said He was going to prepare for us, a glorified body made by God that will enable us to live with God for all of eternity.

Of course, this will all happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; whether by death or rapture. But at that moment – in that very instant – all the things of this world will become worthless to us; just as they ought to be today. If we are living in the future tense, with the view of eternity, then we will be exercising the spiritual mind that Paul wants us to have and we will finally be living for things that really matter.

Is Jesus able to do this? Of course He is because the God we serve and the Savior whose return we are anticipating is omnipotent. He is all-powerful! He is not only able to do all that He has promised to do – to keep what we

have committed to Him (II Tim 1:12b); to aid those who are tempted (Heb 2:18b); to keep you from stumbling (Jude 24a). Not only is He powerful enough to keep and fulfill all of His promises, He is able to do so exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Eph 2:20). He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Heb 7:25). This is arguably the greatest miracle of all.

Paul says that the One who will transform us is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Subdue means to arrange in ranks. Isn't that our problem today? We often fail to arrange things in their proper order. Our values are often twisted because we live in a world of twisted values. Thus, our energy is wasted on useless activities and our vision is so clouded that the return of Christ is no longer a real motivating power in our lives.

Living in the future tense means letting Jesus arrange the things in our lives according to their proper rank. It means living with eternity's values in view and daring to trust God's promises and God's Word.

Jesus really can subdue all things. Is there a particular sin in your heart that constantly resists your best efforts to control it? No matter what you do, it defies you. Turn the battle over to Jesus; put it and yourself into His capable hands. He will subdue it; He will bring it under His power and control. What you cannot do – He can do! 😊