

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Philippians 3.17-4.1 | November 8, 2020
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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our study of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. The "Apostle to the Gentiles" admitted how he put "confidence in the flesh" (3.4), but that he now "press[es] on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [him]" (3.12). In the passage before us this week, we are implored to follow Paul's example as citizens of heaven instead of imitating those whose "minds are set on earthly things."

II. Connecting with One Another

What do you think of when you hear the phrase "earthly things"?

III. Study the Text

- a. Remember that the original letter from Paul to the Philippians did not include chapters, verse numbers, or headings. As such, it is important for us to keep the context in mind.

Let's start by rereading the past couple week's passages in **Philippians 3.1-16**.

How have previous studies and sermons helped you apply these verses to your life?

What questions do you still have?

- b. **Read Philippians 3.17.**

Instead of pointing them to follow Jesus as a model, Paul invites the Philippians to follow his example. Why do you think he does so? Is this arrogant? Why or why not?

Why don't you think he points the Philippians to Jesus?

- c. **Verse 17** also encourages community. The Philippians are instructed to "join together" and to "keep [their] eyes on those who live as we do."

Why do you think this emphasis on community was so important to Paul?

Why couldn't the Philippians just follow his example individually?

- d. **Read Philippians 3.18-19.**

Who do you think of as "enemies of the cross of Christ"? Why?

What do you think Paul means by this?

What is his emotion as he recalls these people? Why do you think he feels this way?



What is your emotion when you think of such “enemies”? Why?

- e. There are two distinct possibilities of the characteristics of this group. On one hand, they could be the same group referenced in **3.2**, who oppose the cross by demanding perfection in laws pertaining to food, the rite of circumcision, and observing particular holy days. On the other hand, this group could live in almost the exact opposite manner, as those who indulge any bodily desire.

So, this group engages either total abstinence *from* or complete indulgence *in* desires of flesh. Which do you think is more likely in first century Philippi?

Which do you think is more problematic in 21st century American Christians?

- f. Which are you more tempted by: Legalism or lawlessness? Religion or irreligion? Which do you think is more problematic for those seeking to follow Jesus? Why?

- g. **Read Philippians 4.20-21.**

Instead of behaving as “enemies of the cross of Christ” whose minds are “on earthly things,” Paul offers an alternative. What is it?

- h. How does **verse 21** speak to themes introduced by the “enemies of the cross”? How does Jesus’ transformation speak to both legalism and lawlessness, religion and irreligion?

What does Jesus offer that’s different than anything we could achieve?

- i. **Read Philippians 4.1.**

After utilizing “walking” imagery in chapter 3, Paul shifts to “standing.”

Why do you think he does so? What’s the difference?

- j. Within the challenges of 2020 – especially the dissention and divisiveness of politics this past week – what is one spiritual practice you can engage to better “stand firm in the Lord in this way”?

What is one thing you can stop doing to better “stand firm in the Lord”?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up areas in your own life where your “mind is set on earthly things.”
- b. Pray for the witness of the church during this difficult and divisive election season.
- c. Ask God to transform you into someone upon whom others can “keep [their] eyes on” as an example of Christlikeness.

V. Digging Deeper

- a. **Read Ephesians 6.10-17** for more “standing imagery” that may have been similar to what Paul was thinking in Philippians 4.1.

