



Week 5: Jesus & Our Identity

Philippians 3:17-21

GOAL:

Learn what it means to live as citizens of God's kingdom as well as God's ambassadors who always prioritize his interests and his mission.

CHECKLIST

- Reach out individually to anyone who did not attend last week. Let them know that you missed them and would love to see them this week.
- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Finalize the date for your Grow Group Prayer Night and send the date to Amy.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members (please include their names and contact info in the meeting notes section). Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Father, thank you for making it possible for me to belong to your kingdom through Jesus. You are my King, my Lord, my Savior. Forgive me when I live as if someone else or something else is more important than you. Teach me what it means to live as a citizen of your kingdom so that your priorities are my priorities and your mission is my mission. May your kingdom come and your will be done in me. Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, & PRAY

Like last week, connect with and pray for your group members at the start of your time together. Ask all group members to share one way they saw God at work in the past week, and one way they are praying for God to work in the week to come. Then spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today.

If you haven't already, decide on a date in October or early November for your Grow Group Prayer Night. Be sure everyone marks this date on their calendars. Email Amy with your date also. (Thanks!)

DISCUSS

- As a kid, can you ever remember thinking you wanted to be like a particular person in your life? What drew you to them?

Read Philippians 3:17. *“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”*

- Isn't this kind of arrogant of Paul? Why would Paul point to himself as the one to imitate? What kind of “example” or “model” is Paul referring to?

Leaders: *Paul himself says in other letters that his example should only be followed in as much as he follows the example of Christ. As Pastor Amy notes, I Cor. 11:1 says, “Follow my example even as I follow the example of Christ.”*

Following or imitating a teacher was very common in Paul's Jewish context. He is encouraging these Gentile believers to imitate only those who live as Jesus did. He is implying that some false teachers have been passing through and perhaps leading some astray.

Remember his readers do not yet have access to the NT, not even the four gospels. The four gospels had not yet been written and collected together for wide use. Most scholars believe the gospels were recorded between 60 and 100 A.D. Paul is writing this epistle around 60-64 A.D.

He has given hints of this model throughout the letter: his attitude toward his suffering (1:12-30), his desire to put others' needs above his own (2:19-30), his desire to consider all else trash (including his earthly status and accomplishments) for the sake of knowing and following Christ (3:4-14), and his ability to be content and faithful no matter his circumstances (4:10-13) Hints of this example can be found throughout Acts and Paul's other letters. Forsaking all other aims, the follower of Jesus is follow Jesus in a life of cruciform love.

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Read Philippians 3:18-19. *“For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame.”*

- What does Paul mean by “enemies of the cross of Christ”? What do his descriptions in v. 19 seem to say about these people? Describe their character in your own words. Why is Paul’s warning important for us?

Leaders:

- *“Many who live as enemies of the cross of Christ” –*
 - *Paul is probably referring to those he has mentioned in other contexts who are false teachers (like the Judaizers) but he is referring more to their behavior or the way they live, not just what they teach. He says he has warned them about these “enemies” before. Paul is probably referring to itinerant teachers who have claimed to be Christians and yet are deceived or teaching false gospels. This points to why this would especially grieve Paul. These aren’t just pagans being pagans, these are supposedly followers of Jesus who are imposters and deceivers, enemies of God.*
 - *Paul spends a great deal of time talking about the cross of Christ throughout all his writings and what Christ’s actions have accomplished, flying in the face of the world’s wisdom and power. The cross of Christ is motivated by God’s love, the expression of God’s grace and mercy. It is selfless and was taken up in obedience to God’s perfect plan. It was a path of downward mobility. And we are called by Jesus to “take up our cross and follow him.”*
- *“Destiny is destruction” – Destruction here literally means “utter loss” or “utter ruin.” This is something of a word play in contrast to Paul’s reference to the idea of being “complete” or “mature” (vs. 12, 15) Paul is speaking of their eschatological outcome as “destruction.” This also is starkly in contrast to Paul’s description in vs. 20-21 about what awaits those who are “citizens of heaven.” Paul is referring to people who perhaps identify themselves as followers of Jesus but their character and choices indicate otherwise.*
- *“Their god is their stomach” – Paul is painting an almost sickening picture of people whose immediate appetites and desires are what they worship. Such desires are their sole focus, and they are pressing toward only those desires; this contrasts to Paul’s desire to “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (3:14).*
- *“Their glory is in their shame” – their “glory” lies on in what they should actually be totally ashamed of (their selfish desires and appetites). As Pastor Amy says, they see evil as good and relish in it. Are we blind to our shame? Are we telling ourselves it’s OK to compromise and act no differently than the culture around us?*
- *“Their mind is set on earthly things” – This phrase summarizes all the previous descriptions. Their mind is only on earthly things. “Earthly things” are not the practical affairs of everyday life; their minds are set on things that characterize worldly life in opposition to God. Col. 3:1-3 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” To set our minds on things above is to love what God loves and to rearrange all of our priorities so that his kingdom purposes are accomplished in us.*

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- Who are the people in your life who have the most sway over you right now? Do they draw you closer to Jesus or do they draw you away from him? What should our litmus test be for determining who we will imitate? What kind of model are you for other believers?

Read Philippians 3:20-21. *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.”*

- What does Paul mean that “our citizenship is in heaven”? Is he only talking about what will happen after we die or is he talking about what is true right now? What would it look like for our church to be a “colony of heaven” in our community?

Leaders: *Paul is most likely playing on the Philippians civic pride as citizens of the Roman Empire which came with significant rights and privileges. And don't forget that part of Roman colonization was to bring the imperial cult: Caesar was to be worshiped as savior and lord. Paul is pointing the church at Philippi to the most important society of all, their present and future participation in the Kingdom of God, the privileges of which are astounding.*

Paul is giving a stark contrast to the “enemies of the cross” and their destiny. Followers of Jesus are a part of a cosmic purpose way beyond the scope of the present broken world. Paul calls Jesus our “Savior” which was a common title for emperors. Jesus will bring all things under his control (remember the Philippians have been suffering great persecution under the present Roman government). In other words, in contrast to a destiny of destruction, Christ will restore all. Christ will restore the broken world and Christ will restore us personally – body, mind and soul. And he will put everything right. This is a classic kind of eschatological (end times) reference of Paul implying the “already and not yet” aspect of living in the kingdom of God. EVERYTHING centers on Christ and EVERYTHING culminates in Christ. Followers of Jesus are to base their entire existence, their entire identity on this belonging to such a kingdom with such a glorious destiny.

It's important to say that Paul doesn't mean the Philippian believers are “citizens of heaven” only when they die. No. Just like the Roman citizens in Philippi weren't looking forward to living in Rome one day. Instead, they were an outpost of Rome. They were to bring Roman culture and Roman rule to Philippi, to expand Roman influence there. In the same way, Christians are not just waiting to become citizens of a place called heaven when we die. (Although to be present with the Lord fully in heaven one day will be great!) The Church is an “outpost,” a “colony” with the responsibility (as we say in the Lord's Prayer) for bringing the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth. Just as Pastor Amy reminds us in her sermon, we are ambassadors for Christ. Our allegiance is to him and his kingdom.

And in the future our destiny is the opposite of destruction. Our destiny is complete restoration and shalom. Jesus is going to transform the entire world so that it is full of his glory, full of the life and power of heaven. And as part of that, he is going to transform our bodies so that they are like his – resurrected from death, wonderfully alive again forever.

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WEEK 5

- What do your own priorities say about who is your king and what kingdom you live in? What do your calendar, your wallet and your relationships indicate? What kinds of things can distract us as a church body and keep us from being a “colony of heaven” in our community?

PRAY

- Pray for yourselves to be ambassadors for Christ in the coming week.
- Pray for VRBC to continue to become a “colony of heaven,” a community that is “different” from our divided culture, finding practical ways to carry out the mission of our King.

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