



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Duties of a Citizen of Heaven—Philippians 1.27-30

FEBRUARY 28, 2011

PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

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INTRODUCTION

For most Americans, United States citizenship is a matter of great pride. Especially when one considers the advantages we enjoy over most other nations of the world, the pride is well-founded. The sense of belonging, the protection from outside threats offered by our military, the security provided by our police, the protection of our freedoms granted by our constitution, the freedom of movement provided by our roads, the access to utilities, clean water, and the best health care in the world are but a few of the privileges of citizenship in the United States. Yet, citizenship carries significant responsibilities as well.

Citizenship implies responsibilities toward others. Each citizen of a society must act with consideration for other citizens. They must often restrain themselves in their actions in order to respect the rights of others. Each must contribute to the institutions and infrastructure that allow all to live together in an orderly and productive way. Such responsibilities are assumed by most citizens without much need for reminder or enforcement. Still, mechanisms are in place to prompt people to demonstrate good citizenship. We teach our children the responsibilities of citizenship and we honor those who exemplify them.

Every Christian has become a citizen of heaven. There are incomparable advantages to this citizenship, yet, there are also implicit responsibilities or duties. Paul, in the passage below, urges every believer to live a life that is appropriate to the great privilege of their citizenship of heaven. This week in our study entitled, Duties of a Citizen of Heaven, we will consider our responsibilities as those whose homeland is heaven.

Philippians 1.27-30—Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the

faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict in you which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

I. WORK AS A TEAM FOR THE GOSPEL (27)

Citizenship always requires a certain level of cooperation. Citizens must be “team players” if society is to function. In order to protect the rights of each individual citizen, each must act in a way that is mutually beneficial. For each citizen to be free to pursue personal goals, they must commit themselves to the common goals held by all citizens. This is as true in the spiritual sphere as in the natural.

STANDING IN ONE SPIRIT

Paul first calls on these believers to stand fast. The citizen of heaven must hold their ground, must be unwavering, persevering in our common faith. You are to persistently and tenaciously hold to the message of the gospel. Paul writes in other places urging Christians to stand fast in the liberty which is theirs in Christ and in the tradition (substance of the faith) they have received.

We are called to stand fast in one spirit—to stick together. We can stick together in the Lord by virtue of the fact that we have been made to drink of the same Spirit. Only by the Spirit’s strength can we persevere in the faith handed down to us through the generations.

STRIVING AS ONE SOUL

Next we are exhorted to strive together with one mind. The word here is actually soul rather than mind. The soul is more inclusive than just the mind, encompassing the mind, will and emotions. Our cooperation as fellow citizens is to incorporate

BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER)
OR THURSDAYS @ 7:00 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAYS @ 8:00A.M. IN THE MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

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our ability to perceive, evaluate, and draw meaningful conclusions. It includes the capacity of our will to decide, to resolve, to dedicate ourselves to something. It includes our emotions and the passions that drive us.

Paul uses a term that pictures a team of athletes competing together against another team in the arena. Rather than acting as individuals, these athletes work together to overcome their opponents. These athletes act according to the same strategy, draw from the same resolve, and possess the same passion.

II. DISPLAY CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL (28)

The solidarity of believers is to be characterized by quiet strength. As believers we are to exude confident assurance in the purposes and the power of God in the world. This quiet strength is an indication, Paul writes, of the downfall of our adversaries. Our confidence in the Lord displays the glorious message of salvation in Christ.

The term used for a believer who is not in any way “terrified” pictures a horse that is spooked by something. Horses that lack proper training can be easily spooked. It may only take a piece of rope or a stick to get a horse to lunge so violently as to throw its rider. The believer is not easily spooked. We are not dismayed by the taunting of an enemy whom we know will be trodden under foot in the end. Our help comes from the Lord and through Christ we will have the final victory!

III. ENDURE HARDSHIP FOR THE GOSPEL (29-30)

“To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” What grace God has bestowed to bring us to faith in Christ. But there is more than just the believing. We have also been granted, according to God’s gracious provision for our progress in Christ-likeness and the progress of others, to suffer for His sake. The love of God which saved us from the penalty of sin is also saving us from the presence and power of sin by allowing us to share in the sufferings of Christ.

Paul affirmed these believers for sharing in his suffering, having the same conflict—the word from which we get the word agony—which they have seen in his life and now hear continues for him. They have seen Paul suffer for the gospel and now are emboldened to endure hardship by his example. Suffering for Christ is a painful experience, yet knowing that countless others stand with you in the conflict provides the determination and comfort you need to bear it. And remember, God has graciously allowed it so that Christ might be formed in you.

CONCLUSION

There are duties that fall to you and I as citizens of a heavenly kingdom. Accept as a personal charge Kenneth Weust’s rendering of the first part of this passage—“Only see to it that you recognize your responsibility as a citizen and put yourself to the absolute necessity of performing the duties devolving upon you in that position.” Will you take your duties up as one who values your citizenship in heaven above any earthly one?

Some argue that to give priority to one’s heavenly citizenship is to render this earthly life insignificant. They warn of becoming so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good. The converse is true. Those who ignore eternity and live for this earthly life only render every aspect of life meaningless. For them, life truly becomes, in the words of Shakespeare, “like a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” For the Christian who allows their duties as a citizen of heaven to guide their actions, they will be the best of citizens in any earthly society.

Are you part of the team? Do you coordinate your actions with your teammates in regards to your life strategy, your resolve to live for Christ, and your passion to see Christ magnified? Do your attitudes, words, and actions demonstrate quiet confidence in God in the midst of earthly troubles? Do you accept suffering for the gospel’s sake as an expression of God’s gracious dealings with you?