



# Hope Springs Eternal

## Introduction

Philippians 3:17-21

When Paul wrote the letter to the church at Philippi, being a Roman citizen was a big deal. Rome ruled the world. Roman citizens had free reign to travel the empire and had a special status. If a Roman citizen were accused of a crime, they had a right to a trial before Caesar if they wanted one (not everyone was lucky enough to even get a trial back then). The church at Philippi probably had a firm grasp on the perks of being a Roman citizen because their city was built as a Roman outpost. It was “Rome away from Rome.”

The Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen. It’s what ultimately allowed him to have a trial before Caesar. Yet, even as he is waiting for a trial that his citizenship guarantees, He can’t help think about a more important citizenship. He is a citizen of Heaven! He has a different king than Caesar, Jesus is his king!

Let’s pause for a moment because we don’t live in a country with a king. We have a president. Presidents are generally elected by the people, serve a term or two and then retire from being president. Kings are kings for life. There is no second-guessing their policy. There is no campaigning against them during the next election. And there certainly are no disrespectful posts on Facebook about the king.... In fact, at one point in Roman history you could be exiled (kicked out of the kingdom) for carrying a coin with Caesar’s image on it into the restroom!

The Apostle Paul lived during the time of a few of Rome’s worst emperors (look up Caligula and Nero). The kings of Rome often thought they were a god. They wanted people to worship them. People were looking to earn Caesar’s favor because he was the most powerful man in the world. One of the Caesars made the other wealthy men kiss his feet. (Remember, sandals were the only style back then.)

When Paul stands before the Roman emperor, he may be asked to burn incense before a statue and declare “Caesar is Lord.” This would be like saying Caesar is a god and it would be saying that Caesar is more important than Jesus.

But Caesar is not a god. He is not more important than Jesus. Paul reminds those of us who follow Jesus that we have a better citizenship! One that gives us the greater privilege of standing before the King of kings and Lord of lords. The one who has the power not just over life and death, but power to grant eternal life. We’ll have new transformed bodies that will be like the risen body of Jesus. Every tear will be wiped away and all the sad things will no longer be true. There will be no more death, no more war, no more famine or disease. All things will be as they should be.

Paul had the right to see the emperor because he was a Roman citizen. However, he was looking past that citizenship to one far greater. He had the right to see Jesus because he was a citizen of Heaven. The emperor could kill him, but Jesus could raise him from the dead. Paul served a real king with real power.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Devotional by Jonathon Hill found @ <https://followjonathan.com/2015/03/26/philippians-320-21-devotional-thought/>

# Open it

1. **If you had a day off with all expenses paid, how and where would you spend your day?**

# Read it

**Philippians 3:17–21**

# Explore it

2. **Who were the Philippians to imitate?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. **What happened to some of Paul's disciples?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. **Where is our citizenship as believers?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. **What will happen to us in the days to come?**

# Apply it

## Get It

### Big Girls (and Boys) Don't Cry!

How strange in a letter filled with joy to find Paul weeping. Perhaps he was weeping over himself and his difficult situation. No, he was a man with a single mind, and his circumstances did not discourage him. Was he weeping because of what some of the Roman Christians were doing to him? No, he had the submissive mind and would not permit people to rob him of his joy. These tears were not for himself at all; they were shed because of others. Because Paul had the spiritual mind, he was heartbroken over the way some professed Christians were living, people who “mind earthly things.” While we cannot be sure, it is likely that Philippians 3:18–19 describes the Judaizers and their followers. Certainly, Paul was writing about professed Christians and not people outside the church. The Judaizers were the “enemies of the cross of Christ” in that they added the law of Moses to the work of redemption that Christ wrought on the cross. Their obedience to the Old Testament dietary laws would make a god out of the belly (see Col. 2:20–23), and their emphasis on circumcision would amount to glorying in that about which they ought to be ashamed (see Gal. 6:12–15). These men were not spiritually minded; they were earthly minded. They were holding on to earthly rituals and beliefs that God had given to Israel, and they were opposing the heavenly blessings that the Christian has in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Col. 3:1–3).<sup>2</sup>

**6. Are you known to cry easily? If so, what causes you to shed tears?**

**7. When have you had someone that you have invested in go a different direction seemingly against your advice? How did you feel and why?**

### “Walk Like A Man” of God!

*“Join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (3:17).* Paul is not being egotistical. It is a false humility that denies the truth by saying, “Well, I’m really not worth imitating.” Paul knew that he lived with integrity before God. He also just admitted that he was still in the process of coming to know Christ and the power of His resurrection (3:12–14), so he is not implying that he is sinlessly perfect. But his life was an example of how believers should live. He also adds that there were others, probably referring to Timothy, Epaphroditus, and men like them who walked with God. Such men show us in practical ways how we should walk with God, how we should deal with relationships, etc.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. *Be Joyful (Philippians): Even When Things Go Wrong, You Can Have Joy (The BE Series Commentary)* (pp. 121-122). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, Steven J.. *Philippians: Enduring Joy (Riches from the Word Book 1)* (pp. 194-195). Unknown. Kindle Edition.

- 8. Paul said that others should follow his example. Can you say the same? What elements of your life are worth imitating? Which elements of your life might adversely affect others if they followed your lead?**

"Observe" or "Keep your eye on" (*skopeo*) means "to fix one's gaze upon" or "to take aim at." The Philippians need to focus their attention upon other godly examples in their flock who model authentic Christlikeness, which would surely include the overseers and deacons in the church (1:1). They need to note the lives of these godly men and replicate the pattern they set—their "walk." Maturity occurs through imitating mature believers.<sup>4</sup>

- 9. Think of a spiritual example that is near to you. What value or priority do they have that you seek to imitate or live out in your own life?**

The most helpful source for spiritual growth for me, apart from studying the Bible, has been reading the biographies of men of God. The summer of 1970 was a turning point in my walk with God because of reading *George Muller of Bristol*, by A. T. Pierson. That book showed me in human form a man who lived by faith, prayer, and obedience to the Word. Since then I've been helped immensely to read the lives of John Calvin, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Adoniram Judson, C. H. Spurgeon, Hudson Taylor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Francis Schaeffer, and many others. I have an article in print on this as well as a bibliography if you're interested.<sup>5</sup>

- 10. Who would you say you are imitating? How can learning from believers in the past help us to serve God in the present? As we read about them, what things must we keep in mind?**

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<sup>4</sup> Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 173). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Cole, Steven J.. *Philippians: Enduring Joy* (Riches from the Word Book 1) (p. 195). Unknown. Kindle Edition.

## **“Betrayed!”**

In verses 18–19 Paul reminds the Philippians that some are setting the wrong example. Who are these “enemies of the cross”? No one seems to be able to identify them with certainty. Carson, O’Brien, and others note that they appear to be people who make some sort of profession of Christian faith, but in reality they oppose the gospel (Carson, Basics, 92; O’Brien, Epistle, 452). They’re deceivers. They’re pretenders. They shouldn’t be confused with those mentioned in 1:15–17, who were Christians despite having bad motives for ministry. Nor should they be thought of as pagans, who outright reject the gospel. Instead, they put on a show as Christian leaders, but a cross-bearing example is missing. Enemies of the cross do not talk about the cross as their greatest boast, and they don’t want to take up their cross and participate in the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s suffering. Their ethic isn’t consistent with their profession. Paul warns us not to be drawn away by such people.<sup>6</sup>

**11. What are some attributes of these “enemies of the cross”? How do we spot the false motives? What is the proper response to such people?**

Kenneth Wuest sums up this section writing that “The individuals spoken of in these verses are not Judaizers but professed Christian Greeks of Epicurean tendencies. The Epicureans represented a Greek school of philosophy which taught that the satisfaction of the physical appetites was the highest aim of man. They had allowed their Christian liberty to degenerate into license. They did not understand God’s grace and thus thought lightly of continuing in sin. They were engrossed only in self-indulgence.”<sup>7</sup>

**12. In what ways can Christians today allow their “belly to become their god?” Why is such an approach to life dangerous?**

**13. How does a believer know if his mind is earthly? How does continual involvement with other believers create a safeguard against this kind of thinking?**

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<sup>6</sup> Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 159-160). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Study Notes on Philippians 3 found @[https://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians\\_317-21#3:17](https://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_317-21#3:17)

Let me say it this way. Not every relationship is good for you. Some people reading my words are aware of relationships in your life that are pulling you away from Jesus Christ. It may be a romantic relationship or a friendship at school or on the job or with a neighbor or perhaps a passing, casual acquaintance or someone you met at a social gathering or on a trip. God's point is clear: if a relationship is pulling you away from Jesus Christ, you must break it off. Period. No ifs, ands, or buts. Break it off. Do it now. Stop making excuses.<sup>8</sup>

#### **14. How do we balance our need to be salt and light in the world and our need to avoid such people?**

##### **“Can’t Take My Eyes Off You!”**

Paul concludes by reminding the church of the heavenly mind-set they should possess. People walking and growing in maturity realize that this world is not their home. We should have certain “groanings” in this life because we aren’t from here (Rom 8:18–27)! Paul reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven. Philippi was a Roman colony. It was a little Rome. When people visited Philippi they said, “This reminds me of Rome.” We noted this previously as we observed Paul’s exhortation in 1:27, which could be rendered, “Only conduct yourself as a citizen, in a manner worthy of the gospel.” Paul is telling the Philippians that the church is a little colony of the kingdom of heaven. When you are in the presence of God’s people, their values and their lives should point to heaven.<sup>9</sup>

#### **15. Our world is facing unprecedented times that have people full of fear and apprehension. How can the church live like a heavenly colony during these difficult days?**

##### **“Our Day Will Come”**

Additionally, he tells us, the church, that the Lord “will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body.” Christian maturity is about growing in Christlikeness, and the culmination of this will happen when Christ appears. Paul and John write the following: *And just as we have borne the image of the man made of dust, we will also bear the image of the heavenly man* (1 Cor 15:49). *Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure* (1 John 3:2–3). What hope this is! This hope should motivate us, assure us, purify us, and center us on what’s most important. The believer has the most encouraging news in the world. This is as bad as it will ever be. Soon we will see Him. Soon we will receive a new body, fitted for the new heaven and new earth!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sermon excerpt by Ray Pritchard found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/go-for-the-gold/>

<sup>9</sup> Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 161). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>10</sup> Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 162-163). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

**16. Paul reminds us in verse 20 that we are waiting for something. How does knowing that Christ is returning compel us to live differently here in the present?**

**17. What are some things that excite you the most about your future transformation at Christ's return? And what questions do you have about that day?**

How will this happen? Paul says that Christ will transform us “by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.” If Jesus can subject everything, then He can easily transform our lowly bodies! Therefore, let us make every effort to know Christ, and in knowing Him more intimately, become more like Him. Let us make every effort by heeding these five challenges for growing in maturity:

- Humbly acknowledge that you haven't arrived.
- Passionately pursue greater knowledge of Christ.
- Never lose the wonder of the gospel.
- Follow cross-centered, heavenly-minded examples.
- Live in light of your true citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

**18. While we wait for that glorious day when our Savior returns, we have a task ahead of us. Look over the five areas listed above. Which ones are evident in your life, and which ones seem to be lacking? What can you do this week to live these out in greater ways?**

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<sup>11</sup> Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 163). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal — [www.villagebible.church/smallgroups](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroups).