

CITIZENS AND SISTERS

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:3

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Perhaps you've heard the bizarre story of Mehran Nasser. For eighteen years, from 1988 until 2006, Nasser lived in the Charles De Gaulle Airport in Paris.

Nasser's odyssey began in 1977 in his homeland of Iran. Because of Nasser's protests against the Shah, he was expelled from his country. For a time he lived as a refugee in

Belgium. But Nasserri claimed to be half-British, so he decided to seek citizenship in England.

In 1988 he boarded a plane for London that connected in Paris. But while in France someone stole Nasserri's briefcase which contained his refugee papers. Without the proper documentation the Brits refused to let him enter their country. They sent him back to Paris. Yet when he landed, without any paperwork, the French immigration officials denied him entrance into France.

And since he had no passport, the French had nowhere to deport him. *Nasserri was a man without a country.* The French authorities told him to take a seat in the airport lounge, and wait until they figured out what to do about his situation. *To make a long story short, he waited eighteen years.* Terminal One became his home.

For almost two decades, Mehran Nasserri slept on a airport bench. Every morning at 5:30 before the arrival of the first passengers, he shaved in a terminal bathroom.

Once a week he washed out his clothes. He pushed his belongings around on a luggage cart. He spent his days reading magazines and lived off the generosity of airport employees who adopted him as one of their own.

Throughout his ordeal, Nasserri would often walk to the doors leading out of Terminal One and breathe in the outside air. But that's as far as he got. He stayed stuck.

If you've ever had a frustrating layover in an airport, you know it can be maddening. You can imagine, an eighteen year layover eventually takes its toll. As the years drug on, Nasserri

grew more and more deranged. His lawyer said his ordeal “made him crazier by the day.”

A spokeswoman for the Paris Airport said of Nasser’s case, “An airport is kind of a place between heaven and earth, he has found a home here.” Often, as Christians, we feel stuck between heaven and earth. Heaven is still before us, but our layover on earth can be maddening.

Like the man in the airport, Christians can live paralyzed. This earth drives us crazy, while heaven is still future. We’re stuck. We’re people without a country.

But here’s the message in this morning’s text, the Christian life isn’t a paralyzed life. We might be between heaven and earth, but rather than live in limbo we need to embrace both countries. Rather than sit around and wait to go to heaven, we need to get out of the airport (*so to speak*) and bring heaven to wherever God has us.

Notice the bookends of the passage we read: first 3:20 “our citizenship is in heaven” - then 4:2, two sisters in the church are encouraged to settle a squabble - work out a peace - show the values of heaven right here on earth.

This is why I’ve entitled today’s text, “**Citizens And Sisters.**” We’re citizens of heaven, but we’re to live like it on earth. You and I have a purpose here. We’re part of the Church, God’s family, and need to be like-minded.

This is why Paul begins in verse 17, “**Brethren...**”

We’re *brethren and sister-n*. We’re God’s family and He’s put us on display for the world to see. In this letter Paul is encouraging the Philippians to be committed to the Gospel.

To live, even die, for the furtherance of the Gospel. *Well, here is the Gospel's inevitable effect.* To be reconciled to God is to be united with one another.

The Roman cross on which Jesus died consisted of two beams - *one vertical, one horizontal.* And the work of Jesus has a dual impact. He reconciles us to God (*the vertical*), **and** us to one another (*the horizontal*).

Remember, in 1:5 Paul spoke of “*their fellowship in the Gospel.*” Paul and the Philippians bonded around a common cause. The Gospel had changed their lives, and could change their world, and together they were committed to its triumph over sin and darkness. They were stakeholders in the Gospel - *blood brothers!*

In fact, notice how Paul refers to the Philippians in 4:1, “*my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown...*” They are not just *brethren and sister-n*, but *beloved.* He calls them that twice in one sentence.

This church was in Philippi. Paul was 700 miles away in Rome, but he wanted to be with them. The Philippians were Paul's peeps - “*longed-for brethren.*”

I have no doubt, if the jail in Rome that housed Paul had wi-fi, Paul would've watched the Philippi livestream on his laptop. He was probably thankful for Facebook.

But better than streaming, Paul wanted to be there in person. He *longed-for* the Philippians. They were his family. And he would've never used *Facebook* as a substitute for *face to face.* His togetherness with the Philippians was a statement of their solidarity in Jesus.

Sometimes people ask me, “*How can I encourage you Pastor Sandy?*” And my answer is simple, “*Come to church. Just be here!*” The way I know you care about me, and the way you know I care about you, is for us to come together. Despite what we say, if we’re too busy to be together it sends the opposite message.

Paul even calls them “*my joy and crown.*” It was the Philippians that brought Paul a deep, abiding pleasure. He considered them His reward - a crown or treasure. *Fellow believers were his pleasure and his treasure.*

Yet, some of you might say, “*But I’m just not a people person. Paul was an extrovert. That’s not me. I’m more of a loner.*” *Well, if that’s you, can I ask you a question... How do you measure on the joy-o-meter?*

I mean is your life full of *pleasure and treasure*, or are you empty most of the time? God *made us and saved us* for fellowship - *with Him and with each other.*

And this is especially needed when the flag of our lives flies at half-mast - in times of loss and grief and suffering - where does our joy come from then? Most often, *it comes through friends who care about us.*

I read about an African innovation found in the major cities of Zimbabwe. It’s a simple park bench with a higher purpose. It’s called “**the friendship bench.**”

There’s an expression in the local language that gets translated, “**thinking too much.**” We call it **depression.**

People in Zimbabwe who suffer from depression have nowhere to go. The country has 13 psychiatrists for its 13

million people. And most of the locals are skeptical of professionals in lab coats. But someone came up with the idea of [the friendship bench](#).

A respected member of the community volunteers their time to sit on the bench and be available for people who need to talk. They listen. They care. They often refer the hurting person to someone else in the community who takes them under their wing. And 87% of those who take advantage of the friendship bench show improvement. It's changing lives in Zimbabwe.

This is what *our church chairs* should be - [friendship benches](#). When we agree that we're brothers and sisters - when we're "*here*" for each other - our caring can heal. The love and joy of Jesus flows between us.

But this takes [leaders](#). Believers among us who aren't afraid to make their lives available and transparent. Believers, like Paul, who'll set an example.

This is why Paul writes, "[Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.](#)" Realize, [Christian living is one of those things in life that's better caught than taught.](#)

It's like fishing. You don't learn to fish by reading a book. You go with somebody, and bait a hook, and try it for yourself. ***Fishing is caught - no pun intended.***

This is how you probably learned to pray by listening to other people pray... Most folks begin to share their faith after watching someone else share their faith...

Whenever I'm around my grandkids I'm reminded of the old saying, "monkey see monkey do." Little kids love to imitate. They learn by watching the behavior of others. And this is how Christians learn. *We imitate too.*

That's why we need *good* examples. Paul asks the Philippians to follow folks who set a godly pattern. I'm asking us *to not only follow, but be* such an example.

For there were people on the edges of the early church who were NOT setting the right example. False teachers were on the fringes. And like my golf ball, a new Christian can get lost if he doesn't fly straight down the fairway - and instead, rolls off into the rough.

Paul states in verse 18, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ..."

Notice, it brought tears to Paul's eyes that not everyone who said they represented Christ, actually did. It's interesting, persecution was no threat to Paul. In Philippi he'd been beaten and thrown in jail. He reacted by singing praises to God. But when falsehood threatens the faith of the church it causes him to weep.

In Paul's estimation what a sad scenario this was, that believers had to cultivate a healthy suspicion of other people who claimed to be believers - but we do.

Earlier in Chapter 3 Paul mentioned the false teachers he had in mind. He said, "Beware of the mutilation" - a derogatory term for Jews who mandated circumcision. These were *the Sabbath insisters - the kosher keepers.* They were

Jews who taught that for Gentiles to be saved, they first had to become Jews.

This meant that *Jesus alone* was not enough for salvation. A person also needed to be circumcised, and eat only *Hebrew National* hot dogs, and worship on Saturday, and any other legalism they chose to tag on.

Paul taught that adding any requirement for righteousness **other than faith** only cheapened Christ's work on the cross. If you or I could do anything to make ourselves right with God, then Jesus would've never had to die in our place. The cross of Christ would've been unnecessary. Salvation is by *faith alone*.

Even today, there are "*enemies of the cross.*" People and preachers who try to minimize its importance.

There are folks embarrassed by the cross, and view it as an insult to modern sensibilities - *the bloody, gory cross*. But apart from it, there is no remission of sins.

If not for the cross, we'd all go to hell. "*What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!*"

It reminds me of a poem, "*You're just out of date,*" said young Pastor Bates, to one of our faithful old preachers who'd carried for years, in travail and tears, the Gospel to poor sinful creatures... "*You still preach on Hades, and shock cultured old ladies with your barbarous doctrine of blood! You're so far behind you'll never catch up. You're a flat tire stuck in the mud!*"

For some little while, a bit of a smile, enlightened the old preacher's face. Being made the butt of ridicule's cut did not

ruffle his sweetness and grace... He turned to young Bates, so suave and sedate, *"Catch up, did my ears hear you say? Why, I couldn't succeed if I doubled my speed. My friend, I'm not going your way!"*

Paul and the false teachers were headed different directions. Paul *prized* the cross the Jews *despised*.

But there was more to these false teachers than just their *devotion to legalism and rejection of the cross*.

In verse 19 Paul describes their character in four phrases, *"whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things."* He notes their *destiny* - their *idolatry* - their *infamy* - and their *carnality*...

First Paul says of them, *"whose end is destruction."*

These false teachers talked about heaven, and it's bright lights, but were headed to hell. The Greek word *"destruction"* most likely refers to *eternal damnation*.

Remember, it was **from the cross** that Jesus told the thief, *"Today, you will be with Me in Paradise."* You don't cross into heaven if you're an enemy of the cross.

Second, Paul says of the false teachers, *"whose god is their belly."* Paul says this mockingly - they worship their own pleasures, and luxuries, and self-gratification.

The false teachers claimed to *love God*, but they actually *used God* to satisfy themselves and indulge their appetites... *Beware of greed in a clerical collar!*

Beware of hedonism with a Bible in its hand. There are preachers who use the God they say they worship to satisfy

their real god - that of their own lusts. It should bring tears to your eyes that they're still around.

And third, Paul says of these false teachers, “**whose glory is in their shame.**” They glorify what is shameful.

Paul is saying the false teacher gets kudos from the culture for giving religious sanction to the perversions of the day. Society hails him as *broad-minded*. He's ahead of his time. He's progressive and courageous.

Unlike that Paul who's stuck in the Puritanical past.

Over the years of my ministry there've been plenty of hot-button issues where pastors have been pressured to compromise... *Why do you have to be married to have sex? Can't you divorce your spouse for just any reason?* Today's hot button issue is *what's wrong with people acting on a same-sex attraction?* But if I didn't compromise then, why would I compromise now?

What the Bible says, it means. Its truths are timeless.

The Bible tells us all sexual behavior between people outside of heterosexual marriage is shameful. I believe the biblical restrictions on sex were authored by the Creator *for our good and for His glory...* And though it might not be “cool” to point that out, it's being faithful.

Here's the fourth point about the false teachers in Philippi, they “**set their mind on earthly things.**”

This is the bottomline. Here's the genesis of all their falsehoods. They take their cues from *culture* rather than *Scripture...* Hey, I hear society's arguments. I recognize their

logic. If there is no God, and the Bible isn't true; *then why not do as you please and make up your own rules?*... I just can't buy into that premise.

The Bible has been a reliable moral compass for 4000 years. It's God's Word - divinely inspired.

I've studied it, and tested its truth. I have more confidence in the Bible today than I did 39 years ago when I gave my life to Jesus. The Bible is wisdom from heaven - and that's where I choose to set my mind.

Charles Spurgeon lived in bygone ear, but his words are so appropriate for our day. He wrote, "Many say that we ought to keep *"abreast of the times,"* whatever that may mean; and there is a certain *"spirit of the age,"* to which we should be subject. This to me is treason against sovereign truth. I know of only one spirit to whom I desire to be subject, and that is the Spirit of all the ages, who never changes... Let the times and the spirits go where they like, we shall keep to the Holy Spirit and to His eternal teachings... Cling to God's word; cling to infallible and immutable revelation! Whatever novelty comes up, keep to the word of Jesus! Whatever discovery may be made by the wise men of the age, let Christ be wisdom to you... Here is your anchorage. The Book is our ultimatum."

And this is where I take my stand. *The Bible speaks to us...* It doesn't *shout* like the militant voices we hear today. It doesn't *project in HD* like media propaganda.

But the still small voice of the Holy Spirit reiterates that despite what men may say, God will have the final word. And I want to listen to God. I want to follow Him.

I love the advice of CS Lewis, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither.” As Paul said to the Colossians (3:2), “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

In contrast to the false teachers, Paul says in verse 20, “For our citizenship is in heaven...” This world is not our final stop. Life is a layover. Unlike the man who was stuck in the airport, we're only passing through.

In the verbiage of air travel, *this life is a connection*. We're ticketed to a final destination... which is heaven.

As Paul said earlier, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

If you're a Christian don't get comfortable in the here and now? Why worry about *pleasing this world*, and *living up to its standards*? *Our citizenship is in heaven*.

Christians are ambassadors. We live in a place that's not our home. We take our orders from elsewhere. We're here only for a time to represent our King.

And relatively speaking, it's a very brief time. Paul writes, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here's another sentiment that's fallen out of favor with today's church - *the idea of an eminent rapture*.

Today, the belief that Jesus is coming when we least expect Him to snatch to heaven those who belong to Him - is scoffed at by some and downplayed by most.

When I became a Christian in 1978 there was a buzz in the air. We were eagerly anticipating the Lord's return. Whenever two believers parted ways, one might say to the other, "I'll see you here, there, or in the air."

I probably made that statement a million times.

That didn't mean we'd bailed out on this life, and didn't understand our responsibilities to the here and now, it just meant we were so in love with Jesus we got excited about the thought of suddenly seeing Him.

Christians today are told, "*Don't expect a rapture. We're not promised a sudden escape. Rather than pie in the sky, our focus should be on making this world a better place.*" I acknowledge we need to manage God's creation in responsible ways, but making this world a better place is a stop-gap measure. The Bible says we live on a disposable planet. *Only heaven is eternal.*

Yes, let's make an earthly difference while we can, *and the best way to do so is by leading folks to Jesus*, but *our citizenship is in heaven*. Our bodies are on this earth, but our hearts and hopes and heads should be in heaven. Paul told the Ephesians (2:6) we've been "*made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ.*"

I'm sure you've heard the worn-out phrase, "*Don't be so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good.*"

But that's rarely true. Read the annals of Church history and you'll find that the Christians who were the most earthly good were the exact ones who were the most heavenly-minded and in touch with their Savior.

It's heaven's citizens - it's believers who long for their Savior - who care most for those He died to save.

And there is a big reason we should be longing for the Savior - verse 21, for He **“will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body...”**

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 this will happen at the rapture - *there the metamorphosis will take place*. All us ugly caterpillars will break out of our fleshly cocoons and become beautiful butterflies.

Our bodies will be transformed. A miracle will occur, **our corruptible bodies will put on incorruption**. A body that was serviceable on earth, will be fitted for heaven.

And after what I went through this week, I am longing for this glorious transformation. From Tuesday through Thursday, yours truly was sick with a stomach bug.

Aren't you glad there's distance between us... I doubt if anyone is going to shake my hand at the door.

Paul talks about **“our lowly body”** - well, a round of the gut rot I endured is all it takes to remind you of how *lowly* our **“lowly body”** truly is. A man is stripped of all dignity when he's on his knees bear-hugging a toilet...

It might not mean anything to you, but I got real excited this week as I read of laying aside the frailties and indignities of this body - and joining Jesus in glory.

On the cross Jesus paid the price to restore everything that sin has touched, *including our lowly bodies*. Thus, at the rapture *we all credit the cross!*

And when it happens, it'll be one more proof of our Lord's ultimate triumph! Notice, Paul adds in verse 21, this transformation occurs "**according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.**"

If Jesus can revive *corpses in caskets*, and *ashes in urns*, and *sort out* the body parts that we *loaned out* - if He can pull off a transformation of that magnitude can you imagine the wonder-packed world for which we're headed? What other miracles await our reborn eyes?

Heavenly citizenship is more valuable than you think.

Here's Paul's point, if you're a settler headed west on a wagon train, and you get pinned down by a band of Indians, and you know the US Cavalry is just over the hill, *that's where your eyes will be focused*. That's why we need to look to Jesus... *the cavalry is coming!*

And if the Savior is on His way those who are waiting on Him won't stop fighting. We won't *give up* or *give in*.

Thus, Paul writes in 4:1, "**Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.**" If you're living for heaven you'll stand up for Jesus on earth. Heavenly citizenship effects our conduct and relationships here and now.

Which brings us ***those sisters***. As strange as it sounds, I entitled our passage, "**Citizens And Sisters.**" And there were two Christian sisters in Philippi...

Paul addresses them in verse 2, **“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”** Now whatever you do, don’t miss the obvious...

Imagine yourself in the little church at Philippi when Epaphroditus was reading the letter that he had brought back from Rome - *written by the hero of their faith, the Apostle Paul*. I mean, what if I’m preaching and surprisingly I address you by name in my sermon.

You’d be shocked. You’d certainly perk up. Suddenly, it all gets personal. *(Now you know how my kids feel.)*

Imagine, Euodia and Syntyche are on opposite sides of the room. They’ve been squabbling. Their goal that morning was to get through church without bumping into each other. So far so good. They were enjoying Paul’s letter, when sudden shockwaves fill the room...

Right on the heels of ***our citizenship is in heaven*** they hear ***“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”*** **Girls, girls, girls!**

Imagine hearing your name in God’s Word!

I ran across this cartoon. Euodia says to Syntyche, **“I don’t know why he listed me first, since you’re the one who started it.”** I don’t know if that was a reaction, but I’m sure of their *“shock.”* The church was surprised...

How did Paul even know? Why does he even care? Paul is about to appear before the Caesar and testify of the Gospel, why does a tiff between two women 700 miles away in Philippi even show up on his radar?

And here's the answer, **our citizenship in heaven is validated by our relationships on earth.** Paul doesn't want to be in Rome fighting for a cause, that two gals in Philippi are undermining with a petty disagreement.

Citizens in heaven are good sisters on earth.

Commentaries point out the original language indicates both ladies were at fault. Apparently, there was enough blame to go around. It wasn't one-sided.

And it seems, Euodia and Syntyche should've known better. In verse 3 Paul says of them, they *"labored with me in the gospel."* They were experienced Christians. Perhaps, leaders in the church. They had helped Paul, but they had also been a burr in each other's saddle.

That such a situation existed shouldn't be a surprise. There's no *friction-free family or conflict-free church.*

Perhaps you've heard the jingle, **"To live above with saints we love will certainly be glory, but to live below with saints we know... well, that's a different story."**

Get people together - even Christian people - and there're bound to be disagreements, and hurt feelings, and heated exchanges. Don't be shocked when humans - even redeemed humans - act like humans.

Definitely, don't let it unravel your faith when certain Christians don't get along. It happens. Pray for them. Be a *peacemaker* if you can - not a *finger-pointer*.

I like the solution Paul purposes. He never condemns these ladies - he *“implores”* them. In verse 2 he challenges them, *“be of the same mind in the Lord.”*

Rather than get into the details - *who’s right and wrong - the she said, she said...* rather than get lost *in the weeds* he reminds the girls that they’re *in the Lord*.

Paul believes in their sincerity - the Spirit of God lives in them - and if they have a will to do it, God will make a way, and lead them to an agreeable resolution.

And if they need help, Paul writes in verse 3, *“And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.”* Euodia and Syntyche were members of a family, so Paul calls on its other members to help them.

And this is what a healthy church does - it intervenes at times in people’s lives - it helps resolve conflicts and settle disputes between husbands and wives, between parents and children, even between squabbling sisters.

Over the years, we’ve been involved in all the above.

Of course, this is difficult, and dangerous, and messy work. That’s why Paul had to *“urge”* the Philippi pastor, the man he calls his *“true companion,”* to jump into the fray. I suppose this pastor was reluctant to get between two strong women, lest he get caught in the crossfire.

After counseling Euodia and Syntyche it’s possible this pastor might’ve charged the church combat pay.

It's also interesting that Paul doesn't name his *"true companion."* There's lots of speculation here - *was it Timothy, or Luke, or Epaphroditus* - we just don't know.

But I suspect that's according to plan. Settling disputes and resolving conflicts are often thankless tasks that never get recognized by others. I don't think it's a coincidence that we end up knowing the names of *the two troublemakers*, but not *the peacemaker*.

That's the way God likes it. *He sees. He knows.* Jesus said, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"* *That's recognition enough!*

I hope you know CC isn't just open for business one day a week. We preach the Word on Sundays, but we also help folks live it out Monday through Saturday. Part of our role is to help resolve conflict when we can.

But notice, it's not just the pastor's job to help these girls resolve their squabble. Paul also recruits *Clement*.

And Clement must've benefitted from helping Euodia and Syntyche put an end to their grievances...

One of the oldest extra-biblical books we possess is **Clement's letter to the Corinthians**. Church history recognizes that it was written by this man mentioned in Philippians. *Clement* ended up becoming one of the first bishops of Rome - Paul's successor. And when the church at Corinth erupted in dissension, he was the one who wrote to dissolve their schism and restore unity. It could be this episode taught him some lessons.

But the duty to help Euodia and Syntyche get over themselves, wasn't just left to *the pastor* and *Clement*.

Look who else is encouraged to get involved... Paul writes, "and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life." If your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life - *and I hope it is, or you won't be going to heaven* - you've also been called to help keep the peace in the family of God. Unity isn't just the job of the pastor or elders, but the entire family.

For we're all both **citizens and sisters** - or **brethren**. Citizens of heaven, but brothers and sisters on earth.

Christians are not stuck *between heaven and earth*. We're *headed to heaven* and we're active on earth.

Be heavenly-minded. Look to Jesus, not the spirit of this age. Embrace the cross and God's truth. Care for others, *enough to be an example*. And let's convene heaven now in our relationships with each other.