

## Living in Christ as a Virtuous Citizen

17<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 9/27/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Philippians 2:1-18 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2, [Paul says, (literally from the original Greek)] **“complete my joy by thinking the same** (implied - “as Christ”), **having the same love** (implied - “as God”), **being of the same soul** (implied - “by the Holy Spirit”) **and thinking as one”**.

### **Introduction**

✘ What difference does it mean whether or not I am a citizen of the United States or some other country? What difference does it make whether I am a member of a particular group or not?

→ Well, citizenship, like membership typically means at least two things. First, it identifies and connects you together with those who are also citizens/members of the same country or group. It says something about who you are. Possibly it helps to define at least the basics of your core values and beliefs and priorities.

→ Second, citizenship brings with it special privileges and rights; connecting you to a group of like-minded people with a common goal, and extending the promise of a certain level of protection by the government; at least that’s how citizenship is supposed to work.

→ But citizenship also comes with responsibilities and duties. Citizens are expected to actively participate in the political process depending upon their position in the community. And generally citizens are expected to serve in defending their country in military or other service when called on to do so.

✘ Paul writes his letter to the Christians in Philippi, knowing that most of them are citizens of Rome. You see, in ancient Rome citizenship was a big deal! Not everyone had it. In fact, most people in the empire were not Roman citizens.

→ Philippi, was unique though; it was a retirement colony for honorable citizens – mostly military veterans. They were proud of their service; proud of their status; and proud of their citizenship.

→ Paul takes this idea of pride in citizenship and puts a twist on it. Before our text, in Philippians 1:27, he uses the Greek word from which we get the English word, “politics” - πολιτεύομαι, which means to “live the life of a citizen” (*Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* by Moulton & Milligan) and he says to these new believers, “Only live your lives as citizens in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I might hear concerning you that you all stand firm in one spirit, with one soul; contending firmly together in one Spirit for the faith of the gospel”.

✘ You see, Paul says that even these diehard citizens of Rome are to understand that their loyalty is no longer first with their country or their military past. Now Christ has made them citizens of His heavenly kingdom where humility and faithfulness to His gospel truth are two of its greatest virtues.

### **I. We live as citizens by the work of the Triune God**

✘ Paul begins today’s text building on his call to us to live as citizens of Christ by telling us to be sure that we put first things first!

→ He says in verse one, “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy...”. These are the core characteristics that define what it means to “live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27).

- This is who and what the Triune God has made us to be. In Christ we receive encouragement in all the difficulties of earthly life. In God's unique, undeserved, "agape" love we are comforted like no other in our deepest hurts. And in the Holy Spirit, we are connected together in a bond of fellowship that is based on truth and purity rather than the false, superficial connections that make up so many of the relationships and political organizations we see today.
- ✘ Yes, Paul wants those Romans, and you and me today, to actually see that God the Father, through Jesus His Son, with the Holy Spirit has already done the miraculous work needed to transform us and gift us with the privileges that only citizens of Christ's kingdom have. We have forgiveness of sins; we have reconciliation with God; and we have eternal life.
  - Verse 13 confirms that you and I did nothing to earn or deserve this citizenship status. No, "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure".
  - And now Paul tells us what this looks like in our everyday lives. Again verse two that I read at the beginning: Paul says, "complete my joy by thinking the same (as Christ), having the same love (as God), being of the same soul (by the Holy Spirit) and thinking as one".
- ✘ This friends, is God's idea of "politics". The word that Paul uses in verse 27 again, "πολιτεύομαι" has the root word for politics. Now, I hear people say all the time, "I don't do politics" or "Politics have no place in the church". Friends, the root meaning of "politics" simply describes a gathering together of people – a city, or a government, or an organized group. This root is used over a hundred times in the New Testament.
  - The thing that turns so many people off with politics has nothing to do with the term, and certainly nothing to do with the way God intends politics to exist. No, the problem is ours to bear, plain and simple.

## II. Humility sets the way citizens look at each other

- ✘ We are the ones that take the perfect unity of heart, mind and spirit that Paul is calling us to be about and we corrupt it with our prideful and sinful ways. In verses 3-4 Paul describes life according to God's view of "politics". He says, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." How much of that do we see in politics in our world today?
  - Instead we see an increase of division and disunity, don't we? And that occurs when we look to our own interests without considering the situation of others. Or if we do, we only consider how we can influence or control other people rather than to serve them in God's love.
- ✘ That's why Paul begins in verse five to tell us where we find the one and only answer to this problem of division and conflict. "Have this mind among yourselves," he says, "which is yours in Christ Jesus".
  - Sorry to disappoint you folks, but you're not going to find the answer in any earthly political party – independent, democratic or republican. Neither are you going to find it by pulling away from, and not being involved – saying, "I don't do politics"
  - No, Paul says, "live your lives as citizens in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27).
- ✘ In fact verses 5-11 of our text tells us how Christ came into our world; seeing a great divide between us and God. Our hearts, souls and minds are saturated in, and ruled by sin. We are the ones who have corrupted His design of politics; of living together in "full accord and of one mind" (v.2).

- And so Jesus – being equal to God (v.6), as God Himself, came to address the problem by taking upon Himself our social standing as human beings; not as a ruler in an influential position of wealth, but “making Himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant” (v. 7).
- ✘ Jesus genuinely put your interest first folks; thinking of your deepest, most extreme need. Which is what?
  - How can your certain condemnation and ruin in hell because of your sin; how can the divide between you and God because you disobey His word of truth, be repaired?
  - The answer must address the fact that sin requires death. But if I die in my own sin, then I get what I deserve – eternal condemnation. Yet if someone who has not ever sinned; if He were to take my place and die to pay my penalty, then the division between me and God will be removed!
- ✘ That’s what Christ did when He “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (v.8). Yes, 1 Peter 3:18 confirms that truth, saying that Christ “suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”.
  - Did you hear that great news? Because of Christ’s death in our place He has brought us back to God! He repaired our division. He made things right. As Paul says in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”.
  - Our citizenship has changed just as it had for the Christians in Philippi. Now instead of being citizens first of Rome; or for you and me, instead of being citizens first of the U.S.; now as Paul says later in chapter 3:20, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”.
- ✘ And as citizens of heaven you and I now look at each other; we even look at those with whom we deeply disagree. We get down off of our high horse, which is all about pride and looking at my interests alone, and we humbly “look...to the interests of others”.

### III. Humble Citizens Evidence Christ’s Work Among Us

- ✘ Now don’t misunderstand what this looks like. Paul reaffirms in verses 12-13 that we can never put our own or the interests of others before God. That’s not the person He has now made us to be. No, He’s the one who still “works in” us “to will and to work for His good pleasure” (v.13) above all else.
  - But a part of His “good pleasure” is that we honestly and lovingly spend time putting ourselves into the other person’s situation. As verse 14 says, we don’t just glibly “grumble” (v.14) about “those people that don’t see things the same way I do”. Neither do we let what’s popular in this world or what is against God’s truth in Scripture lead us to “question” (v.14) our Lord and His ways.
  - But instead as “children of God without blemish” (v.15) by the saving work of Jesus, Paul says we “shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the Word of life”. Why? because as verse 15 says, we live “in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation”. Wait – was Paul talking about the world of his day or of our world today? Which one is the “crooked and twisted generation”?
- ✘ Yes, it’s both. Every generation is cursed with sin – ours and everyone else’s. And so every generation desperately needs the work and the love of Jesus. He’s the only chance we’ve got for forgiveness and salvation. He’s the only one who has died in our place and has risen again

from the dead so that we can be “glad and rejoice” (v.18) with Paul and with all believers on the day of Christ’s final return.

➔ So, let me ask you, are you excited for Christ’s return? ... Are you glad that He has made you an eternal citizen of heaven? ... Do you rejoice that the corrupt politics of this world are not the politics into which Christ has placed us? That in God’s perfect love, we are now of one mind with Christ and one soul by the Holy Spirit? ... Do you honestly rejoice at these things with all the others whom God has gathered into His Church? ...

➔ Then go forth dear brothers and sisters and “live your lives as citizens in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). To Him be all the glory! Amen.