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A Tale of Two Citizenships

3: 17-21

A tale of two citizenships DIG: If the Philippians imitated Paul's attitude, how would that contribute to their unity? Who are the enemies of the cross of Messiah here? How do they mirror Mystery Babylon? In contrast, what is to characterize the citizens of heaven? How can you spot the enemies of the cross? How does your "dual citizenship" affect your life? How do societies' twisted values affect how you live?

REFLECT: How do you see the enemies of the cross of Messiah at work today? How can you resist them? Who are some godly believers that you can model your life after? What does it mean to have the Lord on your lips? Who in your life needs a passport to heaven? Who are you praying for? How is our hope of Yeshua's Second Coming a powerful motive for dedicated living and service today? How about others?

Paul's future: the alien, "I look" showing a new vision.

As Dennis Johnson relates in his commentary on *Philippians*, in these verses **Paul** speaks of two competing *destinations*, two contrasting *paths* that people **walk** to reach them, and two rival groups of *guides* that show the way. **Paul** and those who shared **his** devotion to **Messiah** are role models for **the citizens of heaven** as **they walk their** earthly pilgrimage (**3:17**) toward the glorious coming of our **Savior** and the end of history (**3:20-21**). On the other hand, **Paul** describes those whose **walk** shows hatred towards **the cross of Messiah** and a preoccupation with earthbound interests, and **who are headed for destruction (3:18-19)**. **Paul** first calls attention to mentors' worth imitating (**3:17**), but then, in the opposite direction, toward the dangerous examples that lead to the pit of hell (**3:18-19**). Finally, **the apostle** points our gaze upward and forward to **the City of God** that is our true **home**, and to **the Savior** who will come from there (**3:20-21**).

Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and keep your eyes on those who walk as we do (3:17 Greek). Paul has already commended

Timothy (to see link click [Bc](#) - I Hope to Send Timothy Soon) and **Epaphroditus** (see [Bd](#) - Send Epaphroditus at Once) as role models. No doubt the circle was larger, including members of the **Philippian** church and believers passing through from elsewhere. Finally, **Paul** summoned the believers at **Philippi** to emulate **his** behavior by admitting that they are far from being fully mature, and to join **him** in **the race for the prize** that lies ahead (see [Bi](#) - Pursuing the Prize). Now, in case anyone has missed **his** earlier hints, **Paul** spells out very directly: “Imitate me. Think as **I** think, do as **I** do, pursue what **I** pursue.”

Paul’s forceful command to “**keep your eyes on**” is related to the noun “**goal**,” which **Paul** had just applied to the focal point of **his** own single-minded purpose (**3:14**). Earlier, **the apostle** had urged **the Philippians** to focus **their** attention on **the interests of the others (2:4)**. It’s as if **he** is saying, “Watch carefully. We’ll show you how to run this life-long **race** to **pursue** more completely **the Messiah** who has **pursued** us, and in whose grace we rest.” Yes, you can learn by passively observing others. But here **ADONAI** is calling you to be more intentional and deliberate: find those whom **Yeshua’s** love and purity shine, and fix your gaze on how they live out their gratitude for **His** grace in the way they treat others, respond to setbacks and sorrows, and desire **God’s** glory in every situation.

On the one hand, we need both discernment and courage to identify and imitate the role models whose lives reflect the character of **Messiah**. **The world (First John 2:15-16)** invites us to emulate people who glorify rebellion, self-promotion, and immediate gratification of any and every desire (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy** [Br](#) - Do Not Commit Adultery). Advertising subtly signals that image and appearance are the measures of personal worth and significance. The workplace often rewards those who are clever and assertive. We need to look beneath the surface to notice those who genuinely reflect **the Lord**. Picture in your mind the older believers with whom you worship weekly as you read **Paul’s** profile of **the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)**, or **his** lists of the marks of maturity to be sought in the church’s **elders** and **godly women (1 Timothy 3:1-11; Titus 1:6-9)**. Then, when you identify such mentors, find ways to get close to them and ask **the Lord** for boldness to follow **their** lead, swimming upstream against the strong current of **the world**.

On the other hand, **Paul** has to issue a sharp and sorrowful warning against a different set of guides, whose **walk** leads down a very different path, to a very different destination. **For many walk, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, as enemies of the cross of Messiah (3:18**

NIV). The apostle was painfully aware that **the Philippians** were exposed to a different company of mentors and models, whose motives and behavior contradicted everything that **his** friends saw at work in **Paul** and **his** colleagues.¹⁵⁴

Paul didn't label the specific **enemies of the cross of Messiah** who were troubling the **Philippians**. There are, however, only two options: they were either **Jews** or **Gentiles**, or both. **The Jewish false teachers** who identified with the Messianic community were known as **Judaizers** (see the commentary on **Galatians Ag – Who Were the Judaizers**). **They** argued that the Gospel alone was insufficient to save: **circumcision** and **Torah** observance were also necessary. **Paul** denounced **them** as **dogs . . . evil doers and the false circumcision (3:2)**. Though **they** thought of **themselves** as the sheep of **God's** pasture, **the Judaizers** were actually **enemies of the cross of Messiah**. **Their** spiritual descendants – those who add works to salvation – still plague the Church to this day.

Or, **those enemies of the cross of Messiah** might have been **Gentiles**. Some **Gentile false teachers** held to the dualist philosophy prevalent in contemporary Greek thought. **Those heretics**, forerunners of the dangerous second-century heresy known as Gnosticism (see the commentary on **Colossians**), taught that spirit was good and matter was evil. Since the body is made of matter, **they** thought it is intrinsically evil. In **their** view, salvation ultimately didn't involve redemption of the body, but deliverance from it. **They** believed that since the body is incurably evil, it didn't matter what one did with it. Its desires can be satisfied; a person could practice all kinds of sexual abominations, including homosexuality, adultery, incest, and child abuse, or be a drunkard. **They** taught that all those things didn't matter because they only affected the body and not the spirit. **The Judaizers** added to the Gospel, and **the Gentile false teachers** subtracted from it. **John**, under the inspiration of **the Spirit**, would later write: **I warn everyone hearing the words of the prophecy in this book that if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. And if anyone takes anything away from the words in the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the Tree of Life and the holy City [the New Jerusalem] (Revelation 22:18-19).**¹⁵⁵

In the apocalyptic imagery of the Bible, **Mystery Babylon** (see **Revelation Dd – I Saw a Woman Holding a Golden Cup**) and **the New Jerusalem** (see **Revelation Fv – Nothing Impure Will Enter New Jerusalem**) represent the ultimate “tale of two cities.” **They** symbolize the cosmic clash between **the**

kingdom of man, enemies of the cross of Messiah – characterized by worldly power, materialism, rebellion against **God**, and eternal torment – and **the Kingdom of God**, defined by divine **Presence**, purity, holiness, and eternal peace.

Mystery Babylon is the corrupt counterfeit, representing earthly things. **She** is personified as a decadent, wealthy prostitute riding a scarlet beast, labeled **Mother of Prostitutes and of the Earth's Abominations**. **Babylon** embodies humanity's systems of power, greed, and idolatry. **She** seduces the nations through materialism, commerce, and false philosophies, leading humanity to glory self-reliance rather than **the Creator**. But despite **her** intoxicating power and deceptive allure, **her** reign is only temporary. **Revelation** prophesies **her** sudden, violent, and complete destruction, bringing an end to the systems that oppose **ADONAI** (see **Revelation Em – Fallen is Babylon! She Has Become a Home for Demons**). Therefore, whether our **enemies** were in *the past* during **Paul's** lifetime, **enemies** in *the present*, or **enemies** in *the future*, **Paul** gives us **four ways of identifying the enemies of the cross of Messiah**:

1. They are headed for destruction (3:19a NLT)! Having rejected the one and only truth of salvation – all **false teachers** face the same fate. **They are headed for eternal** torment and **punishment** in hell (**Matthew 25:46** and **Second Thessalonians 1:9**). **The Judaizers** deserved this fate because **they** added human works **to the cross of Messiah**. To believe the truth about **Him**, but also to believe that human works are necessary for salvation is to be damned forever. **The Gentile** heretics deserved **their** fate because they stripped **the cross of Messiah** of its power to transform lives. The result is a dead faith, unable to save (**James 2:14-26**).

2. Their god is their appetite (3:19b NLT). **Appetite** translates *koilia*, which refers to the abdomen, particularly the stomach. Here it is used symbolically to refer to all unrestrained sensual, fleshly, bodily desires (**First Corinthians 6:13**). **The false teachers** were condemned because **they** didn't worship **ADONAI**, but bowed down to **their** own sensual impulses. It could be a reference to **the Judaizers'** emphasis on eating kosher (see the commentary on **Leviticus Bk – Ritually Clean and Unclean Animals**). Or if **the false teachers** in view were **Gentiles**, it could refer to **their** unrestrained pursuit of sensual desires. **Jude** described **them** as **godless people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Yeshua Messiah our only Master and Lord** (see the commentary on **Jude Ah – Godless People Have Secretly Slipped In**).

3. They are proud of what they ought to be ashamed of (3:19c Greek).

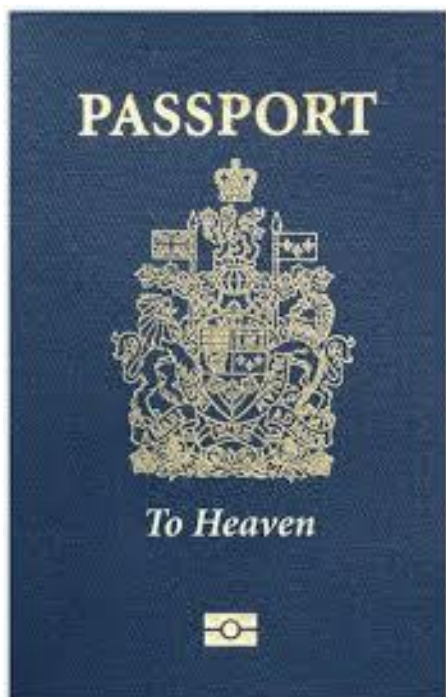
Shockingly, **these false teachers** boasted about the very things that brought **them shame**. This is the most extreme form of wickedness – when the sinner’s most disgraceful conduct before **Ha’Shem** is the highest point of self-exaltation. **The Judaizers** boasted in **their rubbish** – as **Paul himself** had done before **he** learned to count all of it **as loss for the sake of Messiah** (see [Bh](#) – **Paul’s Response to His Opponents: Religious credits that do not impress God**). **Those Gentiles** libertines also boasted – of **their** supposed freedom to pursue **their** most sensual desires. **They** were most proud of **their** worst perversions (**First Corinthians 5:1-2**).

4. They set their mind on earthly things (3:19d NASB). Their earthly focus provides evidence that **the false teachers** were not saved. **James** asked: **Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be friends with the world makes himself the enemy of God (James 4:4).** **The Judaizers** focused on ceremonies, festivals, feasts, sacrifices, new moons – **things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Messiah (Colossians 2:17).** The libertines focused on the passing sensual pleasures of **the world**. Therefore, **the enemies of the cross of Messiah**, whether they add to the Gospel or take away from it, are to be avoided, never imitated.¹⁵⁶

However, the New Jerusalem is the City of God, representing heavenly things. Found in **Chapters 21 and 22 Revelation**, the **New Jerusalem** stands as the radiant, eternal antithesis to **Mystery Babylon**. **The New Jerusalem** is the dwelling place of **God** with **His** people. It represents all creation, where sorrow, pain, and death are entirely eliminated. Unlike **Mystery Babylon** – which thrives on exploitation – **the New Jerusalem** is a sanctuary of healing and perpetual light, symbolizing humanity fully aligned with the divine will.

Paul, now makes an astonishing statement: **My citizenship is in heaven, where I look for a Savior, the Lord Yesha Messiah, for this world is not our permanent home (Philippians 3:20a Greek and Hebrews 13:14).** To be a **citizen** of **Philippi** was to be a **citizen** of distant Rome, where Caesar ruled his immense empire, with all the related privileges and responsibilities. So, the believers in **Philippi**, whether their status in society was a slave or a citizen or something in between, were **citizens** of a distant cosmic capital, of **heaven** itself, where their **Savior and Lord, Yeshua Messiah**, infinitely mightier than Roman emperors, was ruling the universe.¹⁵⁷ Although we live in **this world** physically, we

are **citizens of heaven**. In reality, we have dual **citizenship**. We are members of **Messiah's Kingdom**, which **is not of this world** (**John 18:36**). Our names are **recorded in heaven** (**Luke 10:20**; cf. **Philippians 4:3**; **Hebrews 12:23**; **Revelation 13:8** and **21:27**). Our **Savior** is there (**Acts 1:11**; **First Thessalonians 4:16**); our fellow **kedoshim** are there (**Hebrews 12:23**); our **inheritance** is there (**First Peter 1:4**); our **reward** is there (**Matthew 5:12**); and our **treasure** is there (**Matthew 6:20**). Though we do not actually live **in heaven** right now, we live in the **heavenly** realm (**Ephesians 2:6**). We have the life of **ADONAI** within us, are under the rule of **heaven's King**, and live for **heaven's** cause.¹⁵⁸



These two cities represent two destinations. As believers we are continually called to distance ourselves from the **worldly** values of **Mystery Babylon** and live as **citizens** of the coming **New Jerusalem**. Faith in **Yeshua Messiah** is like our passport. It shows our true **citizenship**, which is **in heaven**. We are not going to be here forever. We are not earth-bound. Why should we hold on to this life so tightly? One day we must go. We can't take it with us. We should hold things of this life loosely. Success and money will not make a big impression **in heaven**. Are you homesick for **heaven**? Believers do not fit into the scheme of things down here. **The world** tries to force us into its mold. They do not like to be reminded that there are higher standards. We reject their values. We reject their philosophy of life. We

march differently than the unbeliever because we march according to a different **Drummer**. We are going in another direction. We do not belong here as our permanent residence. We are just passing through. We are out of place. We do not fall in line with the parade of this **world**. We are **heaven-born** and **heaven-bound**. **God** leaves us here as light and salt to influence others for **Messiah**. We do not want to go to **heaven** alone. We want to take others with us: grandparents, father, mother, brother, sister, friends. **The Lord** might just as well take us to **heaven** now if we are not going to take others with us.¹⁵⁹

We are not to **wait** for **Messiah's** return with attitudes of passive resignation or bored disinterest. Instead, we **are** to **eagerly wait for the return of our Savior, the Lord, Yeshua Messiah (3:20b Greek)**. We are not **waiting** for an event . . . but a **Person**. *Apekdechomai* (**eagerly wait**) is often used to speak of **waiting** for **Messiah's Second Coming (Romans 8:19, 23, and 25; First Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 5:5; Hebrews 9:28)**. It describes not only eagerness, but also patience. As noted in the previous file (see **Bi – Pursuing the Prize**), **Messiah's** return (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kg – The Second Return of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**) marks the end of our struggling pursuit of the elusive **prize** of holy **perfection**, for it is then that **He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorified bodies** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Dv – Our Resurrection Bodies**). At that time, **like Messiah's resurrected body**, our **resurrected bodies** will be recognizable. We will be able to eat, talk, and walk, but we will not have the physical restrictions of our present **bodies**. Boy, I don't know about you, but I'm ready for a trade-in!

Lest there is any doubt that **Messiah** has the power to transform our **bodies**, **Paul** points out that **He** will accomplish all this **by the exertion of the power that He has to subject all things to Himself (3:21 NASB)**. *Hupotasso* (**subject**) means *to arrange in order* or *to manage*. That means **Messiah** will have the power to rule the **Messianic Kingdom (Revelation 12:5 and 19:15; cf. Isaiah 9:6 and 32:1; Zechariah 4:9)**. By **His** power **He** will transform the earth's topography (**Zechariah 14:4-8**) and the natural kingdom (**Isaiah 11:6-9**). **Paul's** point is that if **Messiah** can **subject the entire universe** to **His** sovereign control (**First Corinthians 15:24-27**), **He** has the power to transform believers' **bodies** into **His** image.

As we run the spiritual **race (Hebrews 12:1)**, we must look to godly examples for inspiration and instruction. We must also look out for those **enemies of the cross of Messiah** who would lead us astray. Finally, we must focus on the glorious hope

that is ours when **Messiah returns** and the transformation of our **bodies** to be like **His**. Then, regenerated fully in soul and **body**, we will be ushered into eternal, holy glory and **joy**.¹⁶⁰

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for giving me citizenship in heaven! To have wealth of money or to travel this world, is nothing compared to the glorious beauty of praising you in **Your** holy heaven, along with the multitude of **Your** children, from every language and nation. Thank **You** for loving me so much that **You** give me the privilege of being adopted into **Your** family. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)**. And when it is time for **You** to bring me home, **You** will **wipe away every tear from my eyes, and death shall be no more. Nor shall there be mourning or crying or pain any longer, for the former things have passed away (Rev 21:4)**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*