

Sunday September 26, 2021

Lesson 4: Citizens of God's Household

Scripture: Philippians 3: 2-21; Ephesians 2: 19-22

**Context:**

The 2021 fall series is titled "Belong." Each unit will focus on a way the people of God are called to seek community and discover how God has connected us to one another. The first unit focuses upon hospitality and the role hospitality should play in our Christian formation with today being our last lesson. The fourth lesson, "Citizens of God's Household," invites us to examine how there are privileges and responsibilities to being in the household of God.

The lesson contains two passages from the New Testament, one from Philippians and the other from Ephesians. Both letters are attributed to Paul and focus on ecclesiology, how the body of Christ is composed and how they are called out by God to live. As Paul writes, one can tell the simultaneous joy in leading these churches and yet the challenges present as well.

The first scripture lesson comes from the letter written to the church in Philippi, a Roman resort town. As a result, this church in Philippi would have possessed many Gentiles who were looking for answers to following Jesus and joining this movement. As from other writings, we discover those who were "Judaizers," some who were not necessarily of Jewish origin and attempted to duplicate Judaism in Christianity and taking the acts of circumcision and the law of Moses as prescriptive for being a Christian. Some would have found the ritual as something to offer identity, certainty, and promise to belong to the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> While this was in some ways beautiful, issues were arising as it complicated the understanding of grace and the resurrection.

Thus, Paul tells his own story and counsels the Philippians to beware of those who try to convert them to something he has not taught them. Instead, they are called to a life of faith, continued growth and maturity, finding the disciplined faith and not a life focused on ritual purity or a checklist of the law of Moses.<sup>2</sup> They are to have faith and to grow as a body, not focused on a works righteousness community.

The second passage comes from the letter to the church in Ephesus. Here, Paul gives his ultimate declaration on what it means to be a part of the church. Both the Jewish Christians and Gentiles constitute the members of God's household as a single entity, members of one society with equal rights and privileges.<sup>3</sup> They are a community to be rooted in Christ, not led by their former identities or loyalties. Christ is the one who unites all of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Craddock, Fred B. "Philippians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Ralph P. "Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 37.

### **Application**

Like last week, we might read these two passages and wonder how they have any relation to the concept of hospitality. Clearly, as Paul launches into these packed words, there is obviously either conflict or confusion about the direction of the early church. How does understanding circumcision play a role in welcoming people? Why would Paul talk about citizens of God's kingdom when everyone knew the Roman empire held all the power?

Yet the very reasons we need to examine passages like these is because they tell us truths about our walk with Christ and how we are called to respond. We have been given a great gift in Jesus Christ and while we cannot earn his grace and mercy, he does call us to be transformed with new life in him. As we surrender to him, we discover how he wants us to grow and how this impacts others around us.

For hospitality to truly thrive, we must understand as Christians how in some ways this is so radical to the way of our world. Clearly as the Philippian church struggled with the understanding of law and ritual and the Ephesian church struggled with unity as a body, we too might struggle with our allegiances and even how our perspectives blind us to relationships with other people.

The most mature Christians I know are not necessarily those who have a declared belief on every hot-button issue of the day. Instead, they are people who can hold their views and then respect and dialogue with those who are different. They understand how God has not given them a monopoly on the Christian faith and how they are called to be open to the experiences and lives of others.

This is often easier than it sounds. We all know how tempting it is to be right, especially in this world. There is a high to come when we can either tell people how they're wrong or we can be justified in what we know or have experienced. The sin of pride is so easy and quick to slip in as we somehow believe we have told someone of how we know best, when in reality we have harmed and potentially alienated someone else.

Part of growing in Christ is learning how our journey as a person of faith is not to be a litmus test for everyone. Just as Paul knew he was a Jew and the freedom he found in being circumcised and knowing the law of Moses, he also knew the danger of using rhetoric and standard to hold everyone to his own journey. He understood part of the Christian faith was walking with people different from him and being open to how the Holy Spirit might be at work differently in a person's life.

As aspect of being a citizen of God is understanding our identity is rooted in Christ. It is not in how other people see us. It is us not who our parents are or what lineage you can trace yourself through. It is not the cultural understanding of what a Christian is supposed to be, someone who doesn't drink and votes a certain way. A Christian is someone who is committed to following Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord of all.

Being a citizen though changes things for us. It means we do not just get to go with the flow and close ourselves off from the world. We are challenged to see how God calls us to be open to those God puts in front of us. Our brothers and sisters are those who are different from us and yet God wants us to treat them with love and mercy just as God has treated us with love and mercy.

A citizen in Christ's kingdom is called to a different standard in the world. We are called to listen, to advocate for others, and to be open. All of us have been called to

follow Jesus and be open to those who are sent our way, just as Jesus has accepted and loved each one of us.

What are competing loyalties in your walk with Christ? Who are mature Christians for you to imitate and learn beside? How do you think being a citizen of God changes the way you interact with others? Why is it important to understand your Christian journey may be different from others? What disciplines help you understand your identity in Christ better?

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