

Our Heavenly Citizenship

"For our citizenship is in heaven, whence also we wait for a Savior; the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working wherewith he is able even to subject all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20f).

Paul contrasts, in these verses, two who are supposedly friends of Christ but in essence one is His enemy. He who is Christ's enemy, opposed to His cross, is he who *"minds earthly things."* He who is truly Christ's friend is he whose *"citizenship is in heaven."*

The word *"citizenship"* in the text is a translation of the word *politeuma* and is found only in this Philippian passage. Vine defines that word to mean it *"signifies the condition, or life, of a citizen"* (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. 1, p. 193). Our writer here, by telling us that our citizenship is *"in heaven,"* tells us that while we dwell on earth we are, as all true believers through the ages are or have been, pilgrims and sojourners (Heb. 11:13). This agrees with the apostle's statement in Colossians 1:5: *"because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens ..."* Heaven, not earth, is the hope of the believer, contrary to Jehovah's Witnesses who teach that only 144,000 will reach heaven. Their exegesis of Revelation 7 and 14 is both fanciful and farfetched: a complete perversion of the point John intended to make.

"We wait for a Savior." Christ is in heaven, the ultimate destiny of His faithful. The assurance of angels at Jesus' ascension was *"This Jesus ... shall so come in like manner as ye behold him going into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). Jesus had made the same promise on the night of His betrayal: *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ..."* (Jn. 14:3). Admittedly this promise was made to His apostles, but it was intended for all believers as Paul wrote the Thessalonians: *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord ..."* (1 Thess. 4:16f). He is coming again. We do not know when, so we must wait for Him! Our Savior shall *"fashion anew the body of our humiliation."* Paul does not give details of the change or *"fashion"* as he calls it here. He speaks more fully in 1 Corinthians 15. There he wrote, *"It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power, it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body"* (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Paul wrote of the *"body of*

our humiliation.” Certainly *“corruption,” “dishonor,”* and *“weakness”* all express elements of humiliation. On the other hand *“incorruption,” “glory,”* and *“power”* all are attributes of what our body will be fashioned into: destined to become.

“That it may be conformed to the body of his glory.” It is this statement which makes this writer stop short of saying *“Christ presently has no body.”* But, what kind of body does Jesus have, if presently He has one? Is it the body the apostles felt and touched after His resurrection when He appeared to them? Certain things about that body indicate that body is not *“the body of his glory,”* if presently He has a body. That body in His own words was *“flesh and bones”* (Lk. 24:30). Yet Paul wrote, *“Now this I say, brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ...”* (1 Cor. 15:50). I do not know; however, I am not alone in my ignorance. John wrote, *“Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet manifest what we shall be. We know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is”* (1 Jn. 3:2). And, while there may be uncertainty about a glorified body of Jesus; one thing is certain. Whatever state Jesus may occupy (with or without a body), it will in no wise diminish anything from His glory which He eternally had with the Father for in His prayer to the Father on the eve of His crucifixion (which prayer we are most certain God fulfilled) was: *“And now Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”* (Jn. 17:5).

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