

PHILIPPIANS 1

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

STUDY 1

The book of Philippians is Paul the apostle's letter to the Philippian church, written while imprisoned in Rome around 60-62AD. The letter is filled with exhortations and encouragements towards this beloved community. He reminds the Philippian church to centre their lives on Jesus as 'citizens of heaven', urging them to live lives led by the Spirit.

What is your story? What is your family's background? How does your cultural and family background influence the way you live today? How do you see yourself? How does this impact the way you see others? These are questions of identity - very real questions when we think of who we are, where we are going, and who we are going with.

'Citizenship' is a key analogy Paul uses to describe how we need to see ourselves. He was drawing on the concept of citizenship, which in the Roman Empire, 'Civic Romanus' ('I am a citizen of Rome!') was a citizen's cry that was meant to unify all of the conquered people groups under one empire, and one ruler - transcending all different races, languages and cultures. To be a Roman citizen at the time, was regarded as a high honor that granted status, privileges, and protection. All citizens of Rome were unified with this identity.

As Christians, on the other hand, instead of being identified as a people unified by conquest, Paul reminds his readers to identify themselves as citizens of heaven, unified by our maturing faith. Paul is using this analogy to describe our shared identity as believers - understanding how God sees us as His people.

DIVE DEEPER

Read Philippians 1:1-30 in The Message together.

How does our heavenly citizenship lead to unity and maturity?

1. Citizens bound together in partnership

Read verse 5. Paul says believers are 'partners in the gospel'. Today's culture loves labels. Categories of 'us' and 'them' can often create and cause uncrossable divides. The gospel transcends our differences.

Question: What would it take to be able to say about each other, in your Connect group, "We are partners in the gospel"?

2. Citizens abounding together in maturity and love

Read verse 9. Paul desires our love 'as citizens of heaven' to abound more and more with knowledge and 'depth of insight'. This is how God continues His good work in us.

Question: How might a lack of 'knowledge and depth of insight' hinder us from 'abounding in love'?

3. Citizens living together in one accord and one purpose

Read verse 27. A key identity trait of being part of a Christian community, is that of unity - in the way we relate with one another, not just what we 'do' together, but 'who' we are together.

Question: What are some practical ways we can become more unified in 'accord and purpose' as we do life together?

PRAY TOGETHER

Pray together, and perhaps commit to praying each day in the week ahead.

Father, it is our desire that Your love may abound more and more in us. May we grow in knowledge, insight, and unity so that we can be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Amen.

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