
WHERE IS YOUR CITIZENSHIP?

I'm sure we've all heard people at one time or another categorize people into groups.

- Mark Twain put them into three groups:
 - commonplace, remarkable, and lunatics.
 - (I don't know about you, but I can think of people who belong in all three groups.)
- Someone else has said that there are only two groups of people:
 - those who put people into groups and those who do not.
- Some folks will tell you that there are three groups of people: those who can count and those who can't.

Paul, in the Letter to the Philippians seems to say that there are only two kinds of people:

- those who are citizens of the world, and those who are citizens of heaven.
- And he goes on to describe the difference between the two.

Let's begin by looking at how he describes the citizens of the world.

- First, he says that they are heading for destruction;
 - that their god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame.
- A couple years ago, we heard of people who saw their wealth as a way of getting whatever they want, including unfair entrance for their children into colleges,
 - while taking placements from more deserving students.
- The actions of Russian leadership to take over territory at the expense of the lives of people both from Ukraine and Russia is another example of exactly of which Paul is speaking

When Paul says that their stomach is their god, he is not just talking about food.

- He's referring to all of the earthly desires that can drive our beings:
 - wealth, physical desires, desire for power, personal gratification, and more.

Morris Mandel tells the story of a certain father years ago who warned his son not to go to the burlesque show because he would surely see things he should not see.

- Naturally, the young man sneaked off at the first opportunity and went to the show.
- And indeed, just as his father predicted, he saw something that he should never have seen:
 - his father sitting in the third row!

Today, you don't even have to sneak out to see such things or to be tempted by such negative influences.

- Television, internet, and more provide carefully prepared visual presentations designed to stir up the appetites of viewers leading them to want more of what will only be found to be shallow and empty.
- Many shows and movies misrepresent the true character of people, especially minorities, the elderly, women, families, and young people.

We are increasingly influenced by the false role models presented to us.

- While it is being addressed more now, women are still exposed to "body images" that convince them that you can never be too thin, or too young, or too attractive.
- Men are confronted with athletic hero-types.
- Expensive tennis shoes and clothes will make teenagers popular.
- Regularly we are told which products will impress those around us and will make us feel more comfortable and more fulfilled.
 - And all too often, we fail to recognize that there is always something else, something more, that will fill the dissatisfaction and emptiness that continues to eat at us.
 - What begins as just conforming to society often ends up becoming a controlling urge.

Paul also says that those rooted in worldly values take pride or glory in what should bring shame.

- In other words, the things of which they are most proud are the things that are most disappointing to GOD.

I remember a few years ago, when Wilt Chamberlain released his autobiography, he boasted in it of more than 20,000 sexual conquests during his lifetime.

- Yet there was no sense that there might be something wrong about this lifestyle.
- How easy it is to forget that our CREATOR has a different plan for us than just a series of one-night stands,
 - and that physical interactions most fully bring joy in the context of committed relationships.

We seem to be unable to recognize that GOD has given us the sexual relationship as an expression of oneness between those who have made a lifetime commitment to one another.

- *“Their destiny is destruction,” Paul says, “their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”*

That is one kind of lifestyle—one kind of citizenship.

- Perhaps it is the predominant lifestyle in our society,
 - but there is another.

“But our citizenship is in heaven.” Paul continues. “And we eagerly await a SAVIOR from there, the LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

- There is an alternative lifestyle to that which I’ve been discussing.
- And that is what we, as Christians, need to see and aspire to.
 - It is a life of discipline and devotion.
 - It is a life of faith and faithfulness.
 - It is a life of commitment and service.

Maybe that doesn’t sound like fun, but it actually can be very rewarding.

A servant trip to Mexico brought Heidi and the members of her youth group face-to-face with the harsh realities of life outside of their suburban community.

- Squatter villages and homeless families begging on the streets were not things they had seen before.
- They experienced seeing such suffering as had never even occurred to them before,
 - and they also felt the guilt of being rich by comparison.
- One village seemed to offer some real hope to its people.
 - Permanent homes were being built to replace the shacks in which people had been living.
 - But then the group also discovered that the people would not be able to live there for long, because the village lacked a well.
 - Without the well, plumbing in the houses could not be hooked up, and the homes would be uninhabitable.
 - To build the well, they needed \$3,000.
- Heidi and her friends discussed this and decided that they could do something.
- They called their parents back home and asked for the \$3,000 as a loan.
 - The money was wired and presented to the village leaders.
 - And as the group traveled back home, the young people excitedly made plans for a year’s worth of fundraising in order to repay the loan to their parents.

Christians are people who live in this world but are citizens of heaven.

- We live in this world to make a difference.
- But we resist the temptations of selfish gain and momentary happiness because our sights are on something much greater.
 - We have the advantage of knowing that there is something better from the SAVIOR we eagerly await,
 - a SAVIOR who will take us to HIMSELF as we are, and into the great feast of the world to come.

If you've ever driven the Illinois tollway, you know that they have two types of drive through gates where you can pay your toll.

- If you have the exact change, you can go through one of the gates with a basket into which you throw your money.
- If you don't have exact change, you drive through a gate with an attendant who will take the toll and give you your change back.

When we lived in the Midwest, our family liked to go through the second type of gate with the attendant and pay, not only for ourselves, but for the car behind us.

- It's fun to watch the reactions.
 - Some will argue with the attendant, insisting that they will not take this free gift from a stranger.
 - Some simply count themselves lucky and drive on without seeming to give it a second thought.
 - Some try to catch up, so that they can wave a thank you and continue on their way.
 - Some try to get ahead so that they can repay the favor by covering the toll for us at the next gate.
 - But I like to believe that there are some who go on to pay the toll for someone else.

That's what it is like for us as citizens of heaven.

- We have someone who has gone through the gate ahead of us and paid the toll, blind it would seem to our unworthiness.
- We have someone who has paid the price so that we might pass on through into the kingdom of heaven.

How, then, will we respond to that gift?

- Will we respond out of our earthly pride and argue that we can get in on our own?
- Will we continue with our earthly "get ahead" mind-set and never give a second thought to what we have received?
- Will we simply give a wave, come for an hour on Sunday, and then continue on our earthly journey?
 - Or will we try to follow the example of our LORD who has gone through the toll gate ahead of us?
 - Will we strive to show our appreciation to GOD by seeking to help others go through the gate, as well?

Two kinds of people.

- Citizens of the world.
- Citizens of heaven.
 - You and I have a choice to make, don't we?
 - Where is your citizenship?