

Life on Earth is Temporary

Philippians 3:20-21

Philippians 3:20-21: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

Background Notes

In Philippians 3 Paul dealt with false teaching. The church in Philippi was not directly involved with in false teaching that was circulating in that city, but Paul wanted to warn the Philippian believers about the dangers and the distorting influences of false teaching.

First he dealt with false teaching of the **Judaizers**. They taught that you were not saved or sanctified by Christ alone - you had to keep the Old Testament Law and the Jewish traditions. They taught that your salvation was not attained through God's grace and your faith - that your righteous works gained you merit with God. That false teaching was soundly refuted in the first half of Philippians 3.

So if you're ever dealing with religious people who think that their good works will get them into heaven, have them read Philippians 3:8-9: *“Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”*

In verses 12-14, the teaching of **perfectionism** was shown to be false. No Christian can become perfect in this life - not even the apostle Paul! Look at verse 12: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”* We cannot become sinless in this life, but we should sin less as we grow in Christ.

In verses 17-19, Paul refuted the false teaching of **antinomianism**, or lawlessness. There is liberty and freedom for believers in Christ, but we are not to abuse that liberty, and we are not to turn it into license. The Christian is free from the Law as the means of our salvation and sanctification, but we are not lawless. We are to follow Christ.

In verses 20-21, we have an important focus of Christian living, particularly in contrast to the false teachings of perfectionism on the one hand, and antinomianism on the other hand. In contrast to the antinomians who set their minds on earthly things (v19), spiritual Christians set their minds on heavenly things because their citizenship is in Heaven (v20).

In contrast to the perfectionists who think they can obtain perfection in this life, spiritual Christians look forward to the perfection of their resurrection body, which will be conformed to the Lord's glorious body (v21).

Doctrinal Points

1. The believer's earthly life is only temporary.

We all **know** this truth - but do we **practice** it? So often we live like the people whom Paul denounced in verse 19: we set our minds on earthly things. The Bible isn't saying that we should be "so heavenly minded that we're no longer any earthly good." The point here is that we need to remember that our earthly life is only temporary – like the old Sunday school song: "This world is not my home - I'm just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue."

The illustration that Paul used was "citizenship" (v20). The Philippian believers would understand that illustration very well, because Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16) – an outpost of the Empire. The Philippians were proud citizens of Rome even though they lived a long distance from Rome. In the same way, Christians should be proud citizens of Heaven while we're living on this earth. We should remember we're only here on earth temporarily. This earth is not our home. Our citizenship is in Heaven; that's our home. Right now we're only living on this earth as ambassadors of Heaven (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Here's an illustration. Recently Margie and I spent several weeks on a ministry trip in Asia. We visited Japan, Korea and China. We enjoyed a great time with fellow believers, and tried to get used to the different cultures. We even learned to use chopsticks properly! But here's the point: we never forgot that we are citizens of the USA! While we enjoyed visiting the believers in those countries and found their cultures interesting and valuable, we never forgot that we are citizens of the U.S. Our stay in Asia was only temporary. The idea of buying land there did not appeal to us at all – in fact, it didn't even occur to us. And it was great to get back to our home country!

Do you see the illustration? As believers, we should remember that Heaven is our permanent home. We're only here temporarily, and we shouldn't "settle down" and get so comfortable here that we won't want to leave and go Home when the time comes! The believer's earthly life is only temporary.

2. The believer's earthly body is only temporary.

Verse 21 says that the Lord Jesus will "*transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.*" Right now, we have earthly bodies that are "lowly" – they're subject to sickness and disability and aging. At some point, our earthly bodies start to go "over the hill" (and believe me, the downward slope gets steeper all the time)!

Furthermore, our earthy bodies are subject to sin. We are not perfect, and we cannot be perfect in this earthy body. But here's the good news! The believer's earthy body is only *temporary*. Our future bodies will be like our Lord's glorious resurrection body – no longer subject to disease and death, and no longer subject to sin!

How will this take place? The end of verse 21 gives us the answer: “*according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*” The power of God that will ultimately bring the whole universe into subjection can - and will - change our earthy bodies to be like our Lord's glorious body.

When will this change take place? 1 Corinthians 15 informs us that it will take place when the Lord returns for His Church. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54: “*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*”

We can look forward to a great future! We're not going to live forever in a “body-less” state. We will have permanent bodies - tangible, material bodies - but they will not be subject to sickness and sin. They will be like our Lord's glorious resurrected body! So if you're sick and suffering right now in your aging earthy body, take heart and remember: the believer's earthy body is only temporary.

I remember sharing this truth with a group of teens who were new believers, and they got so excited about this truth! Most of them thought that when we died or when the Lord returns, we were going to live forever, “floating around out there somewhere” kind of like spiritual jellyfish - and that wasn't very appealing. When they found out that we are going to have real permanent glorified bodies, they were so excited.

We all should all get excited about this – it's a fantastic truth! Right now we have lowly bodies - but the believer's earthy body is only temporary!

Practical Applications

1. Are we watching for the Lord on our tiptoes?

Verse 20 says that we “*eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*” The word that's used here suggests “tiptoe anticipation”! It's like waiting at the airport for that very special friend who has been away for a long time. You're watching for that person on your tiptoes!

Are you watching for the Lord on your tiptoes? When you got up this morning, did you think, “What shall I do to improve my earthly life today?” Or did you say to yourself, with a big smile, “*Maybe the Lord will return today!*”

That's a good question to ask each day. Are we watching for the Lord on our tiptoes?

2. Let's remember that our bodies are only tents.

A tent is a *temporary* dwelling. And "*temporary*" is the way we should view our earthly bodies. Some people (including some Christians) treat their bodies like the Taj Mahal – they treat their body royally, like it's the most wonderful thing in existence. They pamper their bodies, they decorate their bodies, and they spend lots of money on their bodies - as if their bodies will last forever. That's not the biblical view of the body.

On the other hand, some people (including some Christians) treat their bodies as tombs. They look down on their bodies as though the body is useless, and they can't wait to be rid of their terrible bodies. That's also an unbiblical view of the body.

The right view of the body is that it's like a tent - a useful but *temporary* dwelling. Tents are not our permanent home. They're useful and necessary for a temporary camping trip; then they're folded up and stored away when you go home.

If you've ever been on a camping trip or owned a tent, you know that you don't treat your tent royally, but you don't treat it like a useless rag, either. You take good care of your tent. It's useful for enjoyable trips. You don't misuse your tent – you don't toss it in a heap in the shed, or allow it to get torn or moldy. Even though it's only a temporary dwelling, you try to get the best use out of your tent.

And that's the way we should treat our earthly bodies. We should take good care of them. We try to stay healthy and fit. We should remember that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We should realize that the Lord has given us our earthly bodies to use for Him - for His glory.

So let's take care of our bodies. Our bodies are not tombs, to be neglected, and they're not Taj Mahals, to be luxuriously pampered. Let's remember that our bodies are useful - but *temporary* – tents!