

THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS

III. Philippians: Nurture In Living In Preoccupation With Christ

M. Nurture In Orienting Our Lives With Our Heavenly Versus Our Earthly Citizenship (Philippians 3:17-21)

I. Introduction

- A. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, his readers were concerned about his imprisonment for the faith as noted by Paul's words in Philippians 1:12-13 that encouraged his readers in view of his imprisonment.
- B. Besides, as we will learn in this lesson, Paul's readers, like many now, were themselves faced government oppression, having descended from a generation of people who were oppressed by a government that had shifted from a republican to a dictatorial format, B. K. C., N. T., p. 647-648; Z. P. E. B., v. One, p. 418-419.
- C. In great application, then, for our era, Philippians 3:17-21 thus marvelously calls Paul's readers to live for their heavenly versus their earthly heritage in great nurture (as follows):

II. Nurture In Orienting Our Lives With Our Heavenly Versus Our Earthly Citizenship, Phil. 3:17-21.

- A. In Philippians 3:17-19, Paul recalled his Philippians 3:1-3 call for his readers to withstand the pressure of the Judaizers who tried to make them submit to circumcision to be saved, Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 662.
- B. Paul thus urged them to withstand the oppressive Judaizers, for they were enemies of the cross of Christ in opposing salvation by grace (Phil. 3:18), their end was destruction (*apoleia* = "separation from the presence of God in eternal judgment," Ibid.) for their rejection of the salvation Gospel of grace (Phil. 3:19a), their god was their own appetite for the fulfilling of their earthly, worldly lusts (Phil. 3:19b with 1 John 2:15-16), who "heaped praise on themselves," priding themselves "in the things they should have been ashamed of," (Phil. 3:19c) and who minded things of this life "to gain merit with God," Phil. 3:19c; Ibid.
- C. In contrast to the mindset promoted on believers by Judaizers, Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20-21 that his readers had a heavenly "conversation" (KJV), or *politeuma*, the Greek word meaning "citizenship" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 689; Moulton & Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek N. T., 1972, p. 525-526).
- D. In the historical context, this word in this directive would have greatly nurtured Paul's readers (as follows):
 1. The "Roman" settlers at Philippi, the generation that had produced Paul's Christian readers there, had arrived either as Roman soldiers ordered to relocate there by general Antony or as Romans stripped of their land holdings in Italy and made to resettle there by Rome's first real "emperor," Augustus. This all occurred with the fall of the former senatorial republican form of government to a dictatorship, and these folk were somewhat compensated in being granted Roman "citizenship" (*politeuma*) when their city of Philippi was declared a Roman colony. (Ibid., B. K. C., N. T., p. 647-648; Z. P. E. B., v. One, p. 418-419)
 2. For Paul then to add that his reader's *politeuma* was in **heaven**, from which they looked for the **Saviour**, the **Lord Jesus Christ**, who would **change** their vile bodies, fashioning them into the likeness of His **own glorious** body, according to the working whereby He was able to **subdue all things unto Himself** (Phil. 3:20b-21) was to **counter** and **supercede** what **oppression** not only the Judaizers had dealt them, but what had been dealt to them via the government's oppressive treatment of their forefathers (as follows):
 - a. On the initial subject of the Judaizers, Paul taught that his readers had a **heavenly** "citizenship" that superceded the **earthly** preoccupations of the Judaizers who were trying to subject the Philippian believers oppressively to submit to physical circumcision to be saved, Phil. 3:20b-21 with 3:1-3; Acts 15:1-21.
 - b. On another level, relative to their relation to the government, opposite **oppressive** civil leaders' **forcing** them to **resettle** in Philippi from their **original** homes with the **compensation** of being given **Roman** "citizenship" (*politeuma*) when Philippi was declared a Roman colony, Paul taught his readers **looked** for the **Lord Jesus Christ** Who was their **Savior** (Phil. 3:20) by **grace versus oppressive Roman rulers**, a Savior Who would **change their vile bodies into the likeness of His OWN, glorious body** (Phil. 3:21a) by the power of His **ultimately sovereign** might. This would **nurture** believers in **blessed, great contrast** to the **self-serving** actions of civil rulers who uprooted and forced people to relocate to meet their own agendas in a shift from a people-based republican format to a top-down dictatorial format, Phil. 3:21b.

Lesson: *To handle the oppressions of legalists or godless civil rulers, we believers should not focus on living for our earthly citizenship that is easily abused by others, but for our heavenly citizenship with its selfless Savior Who saved us by grace and will use His fully sovereign power not to oppress but to nurture us in His glory in the end!*

Application: *May we live in hope of our blessed heavenly citizenship to offset oppressions we face in this life.*