

Philippians Session 5: Live as Citizens of God's Kingdom

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Abstract

In this study of Philippians 1:27-30, Dr. Matthew Harmon explores the call for believers to live as citizens of God's heavenly kingdom by using the gospel as their primary governing constitution. He demonstrates that the main letter body is unified by an inclusio and potentially a chiasm, both of which point to the Christ hymn of chapter 2 as the theological and literary centerpiece. Harmon emphasizes that standing firm in the Holy Spirit and striving side by side are corporate, community-driven endeavors rather than solo pursuits. Finally, the text explains that both faith and suffering are gracious gifts from God meant to refine believers' eternal focus and reveal what they truly treasure.

Outline

I. Introduction and Recap of Session 4 (Philippians 1:18-26)

- A. Recap of Paul's future plans, preferences, and ministerial desires.
- B. The transition to the main letter body of Philippians starting at chapter 1, verse 27.

II. Observations on the Letter Body as a Whole (Philippians 1:27–4:3)

A. Coherent literary unit (Inclusio/Brackets/Envelope) matching chapter 1:27–2:4 with chapter 3:17–4:3:

1. Citizenship (1:27 and 3:20)
2. Standing firm (1:27 and 4:1)
3. Opponents / Enemies of the cross (1:28 and 3:18)
4. Striving / Laboring side by side in the gospel (1:27 and 4:3)
5. Destruction of opponents / enemies (1:28 and 3:19)
6. Salvation / Awaiting a savior (1:28 and 3:21)
7. Encouragement / Entreaty (same Greek word family) (2:1 and 4:2)
8. Completion of joy / "joy and crown" (2:2 and 4:1)

B. Proposed Chiastic Structure of the Letter Body:

1. A: Call to live as kingdom citizens worthy of the gospel (1:27-30)
2. B: Joy rooted in a shared life produced by the gospel (2:1-4)
3. C: Christ as the exemplar / centerpiece (The Christ Hymn) (2:5-11)
4. B': Call to work out salvation (linked to shared life) (2:12-18)
5. A': Examples of life governed by Christ's mindset (Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul) (2:19-4:3)

C. The Centrality of the Christ Hymn (2:5-11) as a "rock in a pot" with ripple effects.

III. Detailed Analysis of Philippians 1:27-30

A. The Command: Living as a Citizen of God's Kingdom (1:27a)

1. First imperative (command) in the letter, set off by "Only..." indicating foundational importance.
2. The Greek verb politeuomai (living as a citizen).
3. Context of Roman citizenship in Philippi and Paul's use of it as an analogy.
4. Heavenly citizenship (politeuma in 3:20) as the believer's primary allegiance.

B. Living in a Manner Worthy of the Gospel (1:27b)

1. The gospel as the "constitution" or "measuring stick" of God's kingdom.
2. Integrity of obedience regardless of the presence or absence of authority figures.

C. Standing Firm in One Spirit (1:27c)

1. Meaning of standing firm: holding ground in the face of opposition.
2. "One spirit" as a reference to the Holy Spirit as the enabler of unity and standing firm.

D. Striving Side by Side for the Faith of the Gospel (1:27d)

1. Corporate nature of the Christian life vs. rugged individualism.
2. Proclamation of the gospel producing faith (Romans 10).

E. Facing Opposition and Fear (1:28)

1. Identity of opponents likely pagans exerting social, economic, or political pressures.
2. Greek term for "frightened" (akin to horses spooked in battle).
3. Fearless stance as a sign of opponent's destruction and believer's salvation.

F. God's Gracious Gifts (1:29-30)

1. The Greek term for "granted" implies a gracious gift.
2. The two distinct gifts from God: the gift of believing in Christ, and the gift of suffering for His sake.
3. The twin purposes of the gift of suffering:
 - a. Forces focus on what truly matters for eternity.
 - b. Reveals what believers truly treasure.

IV. Application Points

- A. Understand that the gospel is the measuring stick and constitution of the Christian life.
- B. Believe at a heart-level that suffering is a gracious gift from God.
- C. Have confidence in God's power to enable us to stand firm together in the Spirit.
- D. Pursue intentional community with other believers despite it being messy, draining, and challenging (Galatians 6:2).