

By union with Christ, the believer becomes a foreigner in this fallen world system. The Apostle Paul expressed to the Philippians the new relationship to Christ in terms that would have been particularly meaningful in their political situation. The “state” to which their allegiance belonged was now in heaven.

I. Heavenly “citizenship” requires your allegiance (3:20).

1. Philippi as a Roman colony had the highest privilege of any city outside of Italy. Paul wrote to the Philippians with their Roman status and thinking in mind, using their understanding of citizenship to explain citizenship in heaven.
2. Heavenly citizenship would eventually bring them in conflict with Roman customs. Caesar could not be worshiped not considered their lord and savior.
3. Their allegiance must ultimately be to their heavenly citizenship, the heavenly “state” to which they belonged, even when it brought suffering.

II. Heavenly “citizenship” focuses on Jesus Christ (3:20b–21).

1. He is the one and only Savior and Lord.

Unlike any human ruler, Jesus Christ is the believer’s Savior from sin. He delivers from the wrath of God. Contrary to the claims of any human ruler, Jesus Christ is the believer’s ultimate physical Savior. He will establish justice, righteousness, and peace one day on earth. Our ultimate appeal against injustice is to Him.

Jesus Christ is Lord, implying both His deity and His sovereign rule. Even though we submit to authorities here, we submit to Him above all else.

2. He is the one who will transform the believer.

For now our bodies are subject to weakness, sinful temptation, death and decay. Solutions to spiritual problems are not found in our bodies or how we treat them.

Inwardly, the believer has been made a new man, a new creation in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17). When Jesus Christ appears in His glory, He will change our outward form to fit what He has made us inwardly. Our bodies will be patterned after His own body (cf. 1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51–53).

Even our bodies (including our use of them and attitudes toward them) are subject to our heavenly kingdom. They are a low priority compared to godliness (cf. 1 Timothy 4:8). But they will nonetheless be transformed out of their weakness into something glorious.

III. Heavenly “citizenship” explains the need for right models (3:17–19).

1. Our citizenship in heaven is more than just a contrast with the earthly things of the cross’s enemies (v.19), since the “but” (NIV, v.20) is more likely "because".
2. It is important to follow right models (v.17) rather than bad models (vv.18–19).

Enemies of the cross are heading for destruction. But believers have "citizenship" in heaven. Follow those who understand that our Lord and Savior is Jesus Christ who reigns in heaven and will one day appear in glory. There is no profit in focusing on the earth, if it means being poor toward God (Luke 12:21; cf. Mark 8:36).

Struggles can be a merciful reminder to turn your eyes to Jesus, since believers belong to His kingdom. Thank God for the peace we enjoy and the provisions of life. But don’t let them lessen your allegiance to Jesus and His reign. Be good citizens of your city and your country, but remember that the believer’s citizenship, the “state” to which the believer belongs, is in heaven.