

Focusing on Expectations

Philippians 3:20-21

Attribution

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

(Philippians 3:20–21)

The underlying motivation for pursuing Christlikeness is the hope of the return of Jesus Christ. Since Christ is in heaven, those who love Him must be preoccupied with heaven, longing for Christ to return and take them to be with Him (1 Thess. 4:17).

Paul had little interest in the comforts and pleasures of this world, as the following passages indicate:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Cor. 4:8–10)

In everything commanding ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things. (2 Cor. 6:4–10)

Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without

my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? (2 Cor. 11:23–29)

This view led him to the conviction that made him write,

“I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better” (1:23).

It is consistent for believers to have a heavenly focus, because **our citizenship (translated by some as “conversation) is in heaven.** *Politeuma (citizenship)* appears only here in the New Testament, though Paul used the related verb in 1:27. It refers to the place where one has official status, the commonwealth where one’s name is recorded on the register of citizens. Though believers live in this world, they are citizens of heaven. They are members of Christ’s kingdom, which is not of this world (John 18:36). Their names are recorded in heaven (Luke 10:20; cf. Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 13:8; 21:27); their Savior is there (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16); their fellow saints are there (Heb. 12:23); their inheritance is there (1 Peter 1:4); their reward is there (Matt. 5:12); and their treasure is there (Matt. 6:20).

Though they do not yet live in heaven, believers live in the heavenly realm (Eph. 2:6); they experience to some degree the heavenly life here on earth. They have the life of God within them, are under the rule of heaven’s King, and live for heaven’s cause.

Paul’s reference to **citizenship** may have been especially meaningful to the Philippians, since Philippi was a Roman colony. The Philippians were Roman citizens, though obviously living outside of Rome, just as believers are citizens of heaven living on earth.

It is from heaven that **we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.** To the disciples who watched as Christ ascended into heaven the angels said,

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

In John 14:2–3 Jesus Himself promised,

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

Because of those promises, believers are to be “*awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 1:7), and

“...to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

Until He returns, believers

“...groan within [themselves], waiting eagerly for [their] adoption as sons, the redemption of [the] body” (Rom. 8:23).

The hope of Christ’s return provides believers with motivation, accountability, and security. In this promise there is positive motivation to be found faithful when He returns to reward believers; to be accountable to God for living lives that produce gold, silver, and precious stones instead of wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:12). There is a corresponding negative reality, as John wrote:

“Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward” (2 John 8).

Finally, the promise of Christ’s return provides security, since Jesus promised,

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:39–40).

Believers are not to wait for Christ’s return with attitudes of passive resignation or bored disinterest. Instead, they are to **eagerly wait for a Savior**, the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are not waiting for an event but a Person. *Apekdechomai* (**eagerly wait**) is often used to speak of waiting for Christ’s second coming (e.g., Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Heb. 9:28). It describes not only eagerness, but also patience.

As noted above, Christ’s return marks the end of believers’ struggling pursuit of the elusive prize of holy perfection, for it is then that He **will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory**. It is then that the eagerly awaited redemption of the body will take place (Rom. 8:23). It is “*when He appears [that] we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is*” (1 John 3:2). Until then, the new creature (2 Cor. 5:17) is incarcerated in the unredeemed humanness (“*the body of this death*”; Rom. 7:24) from which it longs to be liberated.

For believers who die before Christ’s return, death means the temporary separation of the spirit from the body. The body goes into the grave, while the spirit goes immediately into the presence of God (1:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8). Heaven is currently occupied by “*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*” (Heb. 12:23). Those believers who live from Pentecost to the Rapture will have their spirits joined to their resurrection bodies at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:15–17). The Old Testament believers and those saved during the Tribulation will receive their resurrection bodies at Christ’s second coming (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4).

Christ will totally **transform** the bodies of all believers, each group at its appointed time (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22–23), to make them fit for heaven. Believers' bodies will have a new schematic; they will be refashioned and redesigned. Christ will change the present **body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory**. Like Christ's resurrection body, believers' resurrected bodies will be recognizable. They will be able to eat, talk, and walk, but will not have the physical restrictions of our present bodies. After His resurrection Christ appeared and disappeared at will, even entering a room whose doors were locked (John 20:19). Paul gives the most detailed description of believers' resurrection bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:35–49:

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthly; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthly, so also are those who are earthly; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

The combination of a redeemed spirit and a glorified body will enable all believers to perfectly manifest the glory of God. Sin, weakness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, suffering, doubt, fear, temptation, hate, and failure will give way to

- perfect joy (Matt. 25:21),
- pleasure (Ps. 16:11),
- knowledge (1 Cor. 13:12),
- comfort (Luke 16:25), and
- love (1 Cor. 13:13).

Salvation involves far more than mere deliverance from hell. God's ultimate goal in redeeming believers is to transform their bodies **into conformity with the body of His glory**. They will

*"become conformed [summorphos; the same word translated **conformity** in v. 21] to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29; cf. 1 John 3:2).*

"Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49).

Their transformed bodies will permit believers finally to be the perfect creation God intends for them to be for the joy of perfect fellowship with Him forever. Describing heaven, John wrote,

"I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them'" (Rev. 21:3; cf. John 14:1–3; 1 Thess. 4:17).

Those bodies will also allow believers to see God. In the Beatitudes Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"* (Matt. 5:8), while John wrote that in heaven

"...there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3–4).

Believers' resurrection bodies will also be perfectly suited for the eternal service they will render to God (cf. Rev. 7:15).

Lest any doubt Christ's power to transform believers' bodies, Paul notes that He will accomplish it **by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.** *Hupotassō* (**subject**) means "*to arrange in order of rank*" or "*to manage*."

- Christ will have the power to rule the millennial kingdom (Rev. 12:5, 19:15; cf. Isa. 9:6; 32:1; Zech. 14:9).
- By His power Christ will also transform the earth's topography (Zech. 14:4–8) and the natural kingdom (Isa. 11:6–9).

Paul's point is that if Christ can subject the entire universe to His sovereign control (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–27), He has the power to transform believers' bodies into His image.

As they run the spiritual race (Heb. 12:1), believers must look to godly examples for inspiration and instruction. They must also look out for those enemies of the truth who would lead them astray. Finally, they must focus on the glorious hope that is theirs at the return of Christ—the transformation of their bodies into conformity with His. Then, regenerated fully in soul and body, they will be suited to eternal, holy glory and joy.