

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *“Citizenship and Allegiances”*

**SERIES:** *Letter from a Roman Prison*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Philippians 3:17-4:9*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to Bruxy Cavey; Dallas Willard, Moises Silva for insights/illustrations related to this sermon!*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church this morning.

We are in the 6<sup>th</sup> week of a series called, **“Letter from a Roman Prison.”** We’re walking through Paul’s letter written, from a prison, to the Church in Philippi.

Today we’ll be finishing up chapter 3 and starting into chapter 4. So if you have a Bible go ahead and open there with me.

Just two quick notes while you’re turning there. One, a reminder for you to take time to read this letter. If you haven’t yet read the whole thing in one sitting. And if you did way back at the beginning of September when we began this series, do it once more. And perhaps having spent some time studying the letter like we have, you’ll have a little more insight as you read.

Second, we’ve mentioned a few times about a really great “discipleship resource” **The Bible Project**. The Bible project has a great video, an overview of Philippians. And so I, just encourage you, if you’re interested in digging a little deeper. Go check out the Bible project video.

Alright, here we go...

## **I. Philippians 3:17-4:9**

**<sup>17</sup> Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. <sup>18</sup> For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.**

### **A. Follow my example**

Now some, when they get to this section of Paul's letter have asked, "is Paul being arrogant?" Is Paul saying, "Hey, look at me and how fantastic I live my life, and what a great Christian I am." That just doesn't really seem like something he should do.

And in the context, of what Paul has been writing, if you've been following with the series you'll know that kind of attitude wouldn't make sense. This is why larger context is important. Keep in mind, he's just finished saying that he considers all of his many accomplishments, accolades to be garbage. Remember we talked about that word "scubala", last week?

Rather it seems that what Paul means here is similar to something he writes to the church in Corinth...

### **"Follow me as I follow Christ..." (1 Corinthians 11...)**

He is using himself as a flesh and blood example of the Christ mindset.

In fact, one of things that's neat is that scholars point out, that you can take chapter 3 of Philippians and lay it back over chapter 2 (**VISUAL OVER OF SCRIPTURE REFERENCES between chap 2 & 3**). Almost like they line up with one another.

In chapter 2, the greatest hymn...Paul points to the example of Jesus...who being in nature God, did not regard equality with God as something to be taken advantage of, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.

And Paul says, you should have that same mindset. Chapter 3, he uses his own life as an example of this. Humanly speaking, Paul says, I'm a person of complete privilege. I'm not using that to my own advantage, but I'm giving it all up, in order to serve those around me by suffering with and for them.

Chapter 2 - Example of Jesus – servanthood life and in Chapter 3 - Example of Paul – servanthood life.

I think part of the reason, that Paul says, follow me as I follow the example of Jesus is because personal real-life examples are helpful.

We need role-models to help us picture what it looks like to live like Jesus in our world today. When you watch someone else long enough you start become like them. You pick up their habits, their language, their behavior. In fact have you seen some of these commercials?

**Play video:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhSPs9sIUss>

Modeled behavior is one of the primary ways that we learn.

Yes, we are fortunate to have the story of Jesus. And though we understand and believe he was in every way human (tempted as we are)... We don't see Jesus living in flesh and blood any more. I just wonder if at times we are prone to thinking, "yeah but I could never live like Jesus. He was God." Does that happen to you sometimes?

There is something encouraging about looking around at other ordinary human beings who set an example of what it looks like to follow Jesus and to be able to recognize “Yes, that’s what it looks like in our world today.”

Sometimes this concept is referred to as a **cruciform life**. It is when we come to understand, that Jesus did not just come to die on the cross and save us from our sins. Jesus did not just come to complete a spiritual transaction on our behalf, but that his entire lifestyle was an example of how to live our lives. Cruciform life is a life that is patterned after the pattern of Jesus’ life.

This is why the community of faith is so important to our own faith journey. You have a story, I have a story...our stories, our lives inspire, encourage, help one another. Who have you been watching and modeling your life after? And, who is watching you and picking up your behavior?

Alright let’s continue...Paul says, we pattern our lives after Jesus because...

## **B. Citizenship in heaven**

**<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

Our citizenship is in heaven. Your citizenship is in heaven. You become transformed into a person who lives like a citizen from heaven, a life that looks like Jesus life more and more.

As I was preparing this message and reading about this concept, I began to think that this is perhaps the most challenging phrase in Paul’s entire letter.

Part of the reason I think this phrase may be the hardest for many of us is because, I'm not sure we're all convinced, that this is something we really want to do with our lives. You see, Paul is here talking about the place we find our primary identity and allegiance. That's citizenship.

**One of the issues in the early church was the great diversity within the community of faith.** Jews and gentiles, poor and rich, men and women, slave and free, pagan and religious all coming together into one worshipping community.

Paul was reminding them that now, as followers of Jesus, all of those other labels and identities are secondary in light of their new citizenship in Jesus kingdom.

You see as we go through life, we each pick up identity markers. I was born in Zambia. So that's part of my identity. But I'm also a US citizen. That's part of my identity. I'm also a Kipe. I'm a pastor. I'm part of the BIC church. I'm a soccer coach. I'm a San Francisco 49ers fan. These are all "citizenships", labels, identity markers in my life. But I'm also a follower of Jesus. And when I made that choice all of these other labels became secondary.

But all too often, our secondary citizenships, influence or override our citizenship in Jesus Kingdom. It's a matter of my primary allegiance.

Sadly, this is a lesson we followers of Jesus have such a hard time grasping.

I was at a seminar recently where they told the story of the **Rwandan genocide** that took place in 1994.

Back in 1994 Rwanda was viewed as a Christian success story. Two groups of Rwandan citizens **Hutus** and the **Tutsis** had spent years in civil war. But in the early 90's the war's and violence, at least for a short time, seemed to be settling down. And many in both groups Hutu's and Tutsi's had been coming to faith in

Jesus. Some believing that this shared faith in Jesus, brought unity and peace to this country. Rwanda was viewed as one of the most Christian countries in Africa at the time.

But in 1994 the rails came off and brutal genocidal killings began. And Hutus and Tutsi's began killing one another in droves. It is estimated that over a million Rwandan citizens died in about a 4 month span, and all along ethnic lines. Hutu vs. Tutsi.

Most disturbingly, there were Christian brother's and sisters in both groups, killing each other over their ethnic differences. And it begs the question, what happened to the concept of followers of Jesus being first and primarily "citizens of heaven" not some ethnic group? As if the Christians in both groups failed to recognize they were followers of Jesus first and only Hutu or Tutsi secondarily.

It is destructive, dangerous when we fail to recognized that our primary citizenship is in heaven.

Are you familiar with the **Crusades**, a series of religious wars mostly between Christians and Muslims over certain Holy Land Sites. In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Christians, in the name of Jesus marched across portions of the Middle East and North Africa slaughtering men, women and children who were not Christian.

Are you familiar with the slogan "**Brother vs. Brother**"? It is used by many historians to describe some of the fighting that took place during the **American Civil War**. Where brothers stood on opposite sides of the battle lines and literally took one another's lives and both claiming to be followers of Jesus.

Let's bring this concept a little closer to home.

There is a book, that was recommended at the seminar I attended, that I intend to read, written by a Rwandan Christian and theologian, who witnessed what was talking place in 1994 and now lives in the United States. I highly recommend to you as well. The book is called “Mirror to the Church.” **(Image of book cover).**

That this Rwandan theologian is warning followers of Jesus in the US, that we are mirroring what he saw in Rwanda 30 years ago.

Listen to one of the descriptions of the book...

**In 1994, the most Christianized country in Africa became the site of its worst genocide. The tragedy was in Rwanda, but what happened was a mirror reflecting the deep brokenness of the church in the West.**

What is the deep brokenness in the west, here, where we live, that reflects what happened in Rwanda? It’s that for many in the west, who claim to have citizenship in heaven, we have still placed our primary allegiance or identity somewhere else, in some other thing.” And that when push comes to shove, we brothers and sisters in Christ, in North America are just as likely to divide over certain labels and identities that should be secondary.

It made me think of more recently in our local communities, covid became a dividing line for so many, and allegiances were taken. People took their citizenship as a Republican vs. Democrat! Vaccine vs. Non-vax! Masks vs. Non-mask. These issues divided our country and even the church. We weren’t physically taking lives, but did this not wreak havoc all over our country and in our churches?

And it begs the question, does Jesus truly have primary allegiance in our lives or does something else have our admiration and define our identity?

Paul was seeing this happen in the Philippian church, and he was reminding them, that those differences became secondary, when they chose citizenship in heaven.

As Paul begins chapter 4 he addresses some of the conflict that arises when citizenship is misplaced.

### **C. Euodia and Syntyche**

**Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**

**<sup>2</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.**

Scholars suggest these two women are likely leaders in the Philippian church...makes sense as Philippi was a church that was started by women (Acts 16). They are in conflict. We don't know the details of their disagreement.

The idea of conflict in church maybe sounds crazy to you, but it's true 2,000 years ago people in churches had trouble getting along. Aren't you glad we don't have to deal with that anymore in churches today? *"Church would be fantastic if it weren't for people."*

But, notice how Paul encourages them. He exhorts them to set aside their differences for a greater unity found in Jesus. **"Be of the same mind...", how? In Jesus.**

Your citizenship is in heaven, your allegiance is to Jesus as Lord and that overrules these secondary identities.

It doesn't mean, that we don't disagree with each other. It doesn't mean ignore or overlook tension in our community.

But it does mean, that we don't let secondary matters take primary precedence and cause unnecessary fights. Jesus is the great equalizer who balances the scales.

You should know that in this church, you will find people on different ends of the political spectrum. Because our unity isn't found in our political views. It's found in Jesus.

There are people in this church with different theological views. About "End Times"...whether God determines every detail that happens or whether humans have free wills...Eternal security or not...and these are good conversations for the church to have. As long as we remember that many of those theological disagreements are not where our primary allegiance lies.

There are people in this church who prefer traditional worship music and some who prefer modern worship music and some who love Christian rock music. Because our unity is found in Jesus not our musical preferences.

You should know in this church there are Steelers fans and Eagles fans and Ravens...and there even Dallas Cowboys fans who go to this church who call themselves followers of Jesus 😊!

Because you see our labels and our affiliations and our personal preferences are not the thing that holds us together.

What area in your life, would you say is taking too much control of your allegiance and identity...threatening your primary allegiance to Jesus?

So, how can we do this...walk through our differences and our disagreements maintain unity. Look at what Paul says next...

#### **D. Gentleness**

**<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

A lot we could unpack from these few verses but a concept that stands out and perhaps related to the way we deal with conflict and disagreement in community, a key word...gentleness.

It's a word we don't talk about much in world. We kind of like the macho, tough guy approach to life.

Gentleness sometimes has come to mean almost "sissy" in our world.

But gentleness is synonymous with words like tender, kind and is characterized by humility, mildness. "Gentle does not mean the absence of power, but power that is influenced by the Holy Spirit."

Because gentleness is a character trait, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, actively working in your life.

**James 3:17 - <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.**

Gentleness leads to peace.

It's one of the markers of maturity as a follower of Jesus.

The other day I was working on this sermon. And Keagan bless is his heart is at that age where he asks a lot of questions and every answer you give simply leads to another question. And so I answered his question, which was immediately followed by another question. And I answered that one, which was followed by another. And I so I gently said Keagan, "daddy is working right now, let's talk about this later." He proceeded ask, "what you are you working?" "A sermon." "Why do you write sermons dad?" "Well it's my job." "Well what's your sermon about this time dad?"

Eventually, as my emotions started to get the best of me..., *"Keagan I am trying to writing a sermon about gentleness being a fruit of the holy spirit now would you please leave me alone!"*

See how easily that happens to us? And that attitude, never leads to peaceable, loving relationships.

In fact, I think gentleness, far from being soft or sissy, is actually much harder to live out than harshness or impatience. Harshness is easy. It's almost a natural response. Being harsh doesn't make you tough and gritty. Anybody can be harsh almost without effort. **True grit and toughness is learning to be gentle when you don't feel like it.** That's when you'll know life transformation is unfolding in your life. You begin to have new natural responses to disagreements and people who frustrate you.

Paul is saying to the Philippian church, when you're in community with other people, and the fighting begins. And the quarreling starts to happen. And when we people begin to take up sides, and draw lines in the sand based on their labels and allegiances. I want you to remember that your citizenship is in heaven. And if that's

truly the case...the marker, the evidence will be that gentleness is your overriding characteristic.

### **Prayer...**

As we seek to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, our allegiance to him...let's close by singing "Be thou my vision..." together.

### **Benediction:**

And folks, again this doesn't come easily or naturally. We only take on this character by giving our lives over to Jesus.

Gentleness comes from Jesus, as we invite him into our lives and model our lives after his.

Matthew 11:28-29 - <sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,

And if you're wondering, like...boy, how can you train yourself to handle conflict in gentleness...Paul has some great advice for us next week.