

PAUL AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN PHILIPPIANS



Context: Paul is writing from Rome to a well-known Roman colony that was formed by the emperor himself and was a strong patriotic act. Philippi was a mini Rome, which enjoyed the same citizen rights as Rome itself – it was also settled by retired Roman soldiers. Paul is suffering similar issues at the hands of Romans – he is in chains to Caesar, and the brothers and sisters are suffering due to issues connected with Roman matters (society, authority, worship, pressure, etc – a ‘crooked and perverse generation’).

Citizenship & Commonwealth (1:27; 3:20)

- Paul uses politically charged words to note that we live under a different Lord and a different citizenship!
- This is the citizenship to be prized and sought after and which will count for eternity, true peace, true safety, a much better ‘civic’ register with much greater privileges and ‘riches’.

Stand Fast & Guarding

- Military term used in 1:27 – relevant to a city with so many ex-soldiers
- Military term used in 4:7 – echoes Roman garrison guarding him and also the city of Philippi

Book of Life (4:3)

- In contrast to the civic register of Roman citizens that would have been in Philippi (in order to give special rights, etc)

Peace of God (4:7, 9)

- See meditation for more detail
- In contrast to Pax Romana! God will provide this, not anything Roman

Greco-Roman Virtues (4:8)

- Take your culture and pick the good things (if they are good) but do this with a discerning eye for all things Christ! We live by his culture now!

Praetorian Guard & Caesars Household (1:13; 4:22)

- Despite imprisonment, the gospel is still going and converting Romans!
- The message has made it right into the heart of the empire and Christ is winning converts to his name and Lordship! Triumph!

Lord and Saviour (2:11; 3:20-21)

- Jesus as a contrast to Caesar – pride vs humility!
- Will ‘subdue all things’ – dominion over the whole world (not Caesar)
- Emperors were known by these terms and worshipped in many aspects of civic life

Point:

This is extremely comforting to this ecclesia who were being troubled and suffering because of the prevailing Caesar cult and its culture. Standing for Christ was difficult here – but Paul reminds them over and over again that Christ is greater than Caesar and Rome! They could take heart to ‘shine as lights’ in such a crooked generation!

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