



"Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."

—C.S. Lewis

29-Aug-14

A Heavenly Homeland (Part One)

When [Jesus Christ](#) began His earthly ministry, He started by preaching the good news of the [Kingdom of God](#) ([Matthew 4:23](#); [Mark 1:14-15](#); [Luke 4:43](#)). A kingdom consists of several components, beginning with a king. A kingdom has subjects or citizens. It has laws and a defined territory. Many Christians, however, focus only on the King part of the Kingdom, and they even do that selectively: They latch onto what the King *offers*, but in general they overlook what the King *requires*. They altogether ignore the aspects of citizenship, of lawful obligations, and the present and future territory of the Kingdom.

We know from Scripture that when Christ returns, He will establish the Kingdom on earth and all people will be His subjects then. But what does *citizenship* entail *now*—before His return? How does this aspect of [the gospel](#) message affect us at this time?

By way of definition, a *citizen* is an inhabitant of a city or place who enjoys the freedom and privileges of the entity in which he resides. Upon our [baptism](#), we become citizens of the Kingdom of [God](#). [Colossians 1:13](#) tells us that the Father "has delivered us from the power of darkness and *conveyed*

us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Even though the Kingdom of God has not yet been [established on earth](#), and even though we cannot fully *inherit* the Kingdom until our resurrection ([I Corinthians 15:50-53](#)), once we have been delivered by God, we are already a part of the Kingdom of His Son. This means that we can enjoy the incredible benefits of that divine State, but it also means that we are under obligation to it—and that obligation far supersedes the obligation of any secondary, earthly citizenship.

In Paul's epistle to the Philippians, he describes our heavenly citizenship:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. ([Philippians 3:20-21](#))

The Amplified Bible translates verse 20 as, "But we are citizens of the state (commonwealth, homeland) which is in heaven, and from it also we earnestly and patiently await [the coming of] the Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah) [as] Savior."

In this verse, the King James Version uses the word "conversation" rather than "citizenship" because the former word had a much fuller meaning in the 1600s than it does today. For us, it generally just means "a dialogue." But according to the *American Dictionary of the English Language*, published by Noah Webster in 1828, *conversation* used to mean "the general course of manners, behavior, and deportment, especially with respect to morals." It implied community, familiarity, and close fellowship. A man's conversation was the general way he conducted himself, and that *way* was defined by the community or fellowship of which he was a part.

Modern translations use the word "citizenship" because the Greek word here is *politeuma*. It is from where we derive our word "politics," as well as "polite." The root, *poli*, means "a city," just as the root of our English word "citizenship" is *citi* (from which came "city"). It suggests that one's city or community influences how one behaves and interacts with others. Again, at

its base is the sense of community that binds people together and defines the accepted norms of behavior, and that community typically had a city or other well-defined place as its source.

What Paul means, then, is that, not only are we *citizens* of that heavenly Kingdom, but also that spiritual community, that divine fellowship, should be the *source*—as Noah Webster put it—of our "general course of manners, behavior, and deportment, especially with respect to morals." That Kingdom is our new homeland, and our loyalty to it puts constraints on us.

We not only *belong* to that Kingdom, but in [II Corinthians 5:20](#), Paul calls us [ambassadors for Christ](#). We *represent* that Kingdom to [the world](#), just as a diplomat represents his homeland to the people and government of a foreign land. Our citizenship requires that we promote the interests, culture, position, standards, and overall will of our heavenly Kingdom.

[Philippians 3:20](#) begins with the word "for," indicating that it is expounding on what has come before it. The whole chapter warns against those who were negatively influencing the Philippians, and Paul keeps returning to the fact that our standing with Christ is what should drive us and for what we should be willing to sacrifice everything. Earlier, in [Philippians 3:2](#), Paul cautions against evil workers, and those he is writing about were probably once part of the same heavenly homeland, yet who had renounced their citizenship. The apostle does not state that directly, but his writing indicates that something had affected him deeply.

In the preceding verses, he fills in some of the attributes of those people whom he was using as a negative contrast to the heavenly homeland:

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. ([Philippians 3:18-19](#))

He describes the antagonists here as "enemies of the cross of Christ." That is, they were hostile to His atoning sacrifice and all that it opened up. They were adversaries of the very act that could cleanse them of their sins and

remove the death penalty. It is reminiscent of [Hebrews 10:26-31](#), which describes those who [sin](#) willfully—as a way of life—after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and who no longer have a sacrifice for their sins. Perhaps those who caused Paul's weeping had the truth at one time, yet they had trampled the Son of God underfoot because they did not value their heavenly citizenship.

He goes on to write that their end is destruction, which fits those who have given up their one chance for salvation. Saying their "god is their belly," he is not just indicating that they like to eat and drink. He is really talking about the heart, not the stomach, implying that they serve what is in their own hearts. Remember that he is contrasting them to faithful brethren who were serving their heavenly homeland rather than themselves.

The enemies of Christ's sacrifice are those who serve their own whims, desires, fears, feelings, or appetites, as opposed to serving the One who has paid their life-debt. As the end of verse 19 states, they set their minds on earthly—worldly—things. Other translations read that they *side with* earthly things. What is more, they have gone so far that Paul declares that they *glory* in what is actually shameful. They have rejected truth and the payment for their sins, and now they take delight in what is reprehensible.

With this background, we can see what led up to Paul's statement about our citizenship being in heaven. Our spiritual community, with its source in Jesus Christ, is the antithesis of the world's community. The two are as far apart as heaven is from earth. We will see more of this divide in Part Two.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Heavenly Citizenship \(Part One\)](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Martin Collins teaches that called-out saints, we are no longer strangers, but are granted the privilege to be citizens of the kingdom of God. As current

ambassadors of God's Kingdom, we have the responsibility to adhere to God's standard. As citizens of God's Kingdom, we must make sure that we have a birth certificate, and not merely a passport (a kind of spiritual green card). As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are strangers, foreigners, aliens, or pilgrims to the world, but full-fledged citizens of God's Kingdom. Christians are not citizens of the world; they cannot be. The Christian has gone through the narrow gate and has built his foundation on a rock. The difference between the wheat and tare is difficult to see on the surface, but can be distinguished by the fruit he bears. To stress the vital difference between the stranger and family, we must use the cliché, "blood is thicker than water." How can we know whether we are citizen or a stranger in God's Kingdom? Do we feel at ease among God's people? Do we feel more at ease among God's people as well as other social groups? Do we understand the context of the conversations within God's family or do we feel like outsiders? Are we in on the family inner secrets? Are you conforming to the laws and customs of God's Kingdom? We cannot enter God's Kingdom unless we have a birth certificate rather than a passport or temporary visa.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[How to Conduct Ourselves as Ambassadors for Christ](#)

by David F. Maas

Do we have what it takes to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ? Do any of us know how an ambassador should behave? David Maas uses his experiences with ambassadors to provide some insight.

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