

Heavenly Citizenship (Part 2)

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In the past, I have taken advantage of my dual citizenship. On one trip to Europe many years ago, I entered the United Kingdom with my United Kingdom passport because I was going to be travelling around Europe. It was easier to hold up a United Kingdom passport, when at the borders of Germany and Switzerland and areas like that, and they would just wave you through. But if you had an American passport, they checked it and it was a slower process, as some of you experience coming into the United States.

On my way back to the United States from the United Kingdom, I had forgotten which passport I had used to go into the country, so I pulled out my American passport and handed it to the woman. She looked for the stamp that allows you to come into the country, and it was not there. She said, "Do you have a British passport?" So, I had to pull out the United Kingdom passport to get out of the country. I have not renewed that passport since because I have not had the need for it. I am first and foremost an American; there is no doubt there. My Dad's ancestry goes back to the colonies in the 1600s, so I feel that my roots are here, and my mother's are in England, which ties me to England somewhat.

I was talking with Ulrich Richter a few days ago, and he said that South Africa is doing away with dual citizenships. The problem that has come up is that there are so many Africans with dual citizenship throughout the countries that they are taking the jobs of the South Africans, and it is causing a great deal of trouble and animosity.

There is coming a day when the Globalists will try to do away our heavenly citizenship, and we will be tested to see if our birth certificate in heaven is real, or whether we are just travelling on a passport.

Matthew 24:9-10 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

There is no doubt that we will be tested. All of us will not be killed or martyred—some may be, and some will be protected.

Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the

one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

We see that we cannot have a spiritual citizenship in heaven and one on this earth. In Part 1 of my sermon entitled Heavenly Citizenship, I used Ephesians 2:19-22 as my pivotal scripture. We will continue to explore what it means to have our citizenship in heaven. We saw some of the privileges of our heavenly citizenship. In Part 2, we are going to see more privileges and some of our responsibilities involved in that citizenship.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Just as a brief recap: in these words, the apostle Paul puts before us the glories and privileges and advantages of membership in the church. He tells us, in the first chapter of this epistle, that this is only possible as long as "the eyes of our understanding are enlightened." It is impossible apart from that.

The church is nothing but an institution to people whose eyes are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. They may like the members, and enjoy being in it as an institution or a social club, but that is not what Paul wants us to see. He prays that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened that we may know "what is the hope of our calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe," as Ephesians 1:18 tells us.

Paul stresses the vital importance of our being absolutely certain that we are in the position described in this verse. We cannot hope to realize the privileges of the position unless we know what the position is, and unless we are quite sure that we are in it.

We have seen the importance of knowing for certain that we are no longer strangers and foreigners, of knowing that we no longer live on a passport, but that we really have our birth certificates, and that we really do belong.

All of the epistles are written to the members of Christian churches, and what every one of them does is they all start by giving us a picture of our position as members of God's

church, and then, having done that, they say in the light of that, this is obviously how you have to live.

Most of our trials, troubles, tribulations, and problems would be viewed in an entirely different manner if we really saw ourselves as we are in Christ. It is not surprising, then, that Paul emphasizes it so much. Here in Ephesians 2:19, he puts it in the form of a number of pictures.

We have three pictures presented together all at once. The first is the church as a great state or kingdom. Next, it is also a family. And then, it is also a temple. He had already given us one earlier picture where he compares the church to a body—one body, one new man.

Paul later uses another illustration, in Ephesians 5, where he says the relationship between the church and Jesus Christ is the relationship between a bride and bridegroom. It is interesting to notice that Paul uses a variety of pictures and illustrations; and it is important that we are clear as to why he does.

Any one illustration is not enough. The truth is so great and many-sided that Paul has to multiply his pictures and images. Each one of them conveys and enables us to see some specific aspect of truth that is not as well conveyed by the other illustrations and pictures.

We come now to the first picture. “You are no longer strangers and foreigners.” Well, what are we then? We are “fellow citizens with the saints!” That is the first picture. Paul compares the church to a city, or a state, or a kingdom.

Paul was well-educated in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He knew that the message of all the prophets was an attempt to impress upon the children of Israel their unique relationship to God as citizens of His eternal Kingdom. Then, as you come to the New Testament, you find this is a central theme in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Look at His parables of the Kingdom. He always thought in terms of the Kingdom. He said that He had come to establish a Kingdom. He said that He was a King, and He was crucified for saying that, in a sense, on the purely secular level.

All of His teaching is about the Kingdom and people entering into His Kingdom. He starts by saying it to such a man as Nicodemus: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” It is integral to His whole message.

The Sermon on the Mount has been well-described as a manifesto of that Kingdom. The Kingdom is found constantly in the writings of the apostle Paul. We also find it here in I Peter 2. Peter quotes the words of Exodus 19, and then adds:

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

What does this tell us about ourselves? What kind of definition of the church does this give us? It is quite simple if you have a clear concept of a city, state or kingdom. The first thing that it obviously emphasizes is that we are a people who are separate from, and made distinct from, all others.

Ancient cities had city walls around them. You can see ruins and remnants of these walls in various cities in England, and in other European countries, and many other places around the world. What was the purpose of the wall? It was to separate the citizens. It shuts them in, and it shuts others out.

There were gates leading through the wall into the city that were shut at a given hour, and they were opened at another hour the next morning. The whole concept of the city means separation—a drawing out of, a setting apart, a surrounding, or even an encasing.

If you would rather think of it in terms of countries or states, there is always a boundary to a state, a boundary to every country. It may be the sea, a river, or a range of mountains; or it may be some artificially determined line that is drawn by those in authority.

It does not matter what it is, but there are always boundaries, and you cannot pass from one country to another without crossing the boundary. You have to pass through customs, and show your passport, and have your possessions examined, because you are at the boundary. Sadly, though, this is true everywhere in the world except the southern border of the United States. I do not think that problem is going to be rectified because there is a plan going on behind the scenes to open up the three countries of the United States, Canada, and Mexico to become one region.

You cannot think of a state or a kingdom without boundaries. The purpose of

boundaries is to say to certain people, "This far, but no further," and to say to those within the boundaries, "This is your city, or your state, or your country, and this is the land to which you belong."

The importance of this doctrine should be self-evident. You cannot be a Christian without being a separated person. You cannot be in the Kingdom of God and in the kingdom of the world at the same time. There is this fundamental either-or, whether we like it or not. Certainly we appreciate being separated from the world and being in God's church.

Paul reminds the Galatian Christians that God and Jesus Christ have delivered them.

Galatians 1:3-4 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

In writing to the Colossians, Paul says:

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Satan does not want us to keep our heavenly citizenship, and he is doing everything that he can to thwart that. He wants us to use our worldly passport instead.

If we are Christians, then, we are separated people. We are no longer like everybody else. But there is always someone who misses the point, and asks, "Is that not being Pharisaical? Is that not being proud?" Of course, it is not.

The Pharisee did separate himself, but it was the way and the attitude that he did it that was wrong. It was not the separation that was wrong; it was the spirit in which he did it. It is not a matter of arrogant pride; it is a matter of being a loyal citizen to the Kingdom of God, to God Himself, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If we are truly a Christian, a member of the church, then we have been taken out of the world, and we are separated. It is basic, it is fundamental, and it is one of the first things that should be obvious upon our baptism and the laying on of hands and our receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Let us move on to something else. The second thing that comes out of that, of course, is

that citizens are people who are bound together by a common allegiance to a ruler, to authority, to law, and to a way of life. This is always true of a city, a state, or a kingdom. Being separated in this way, we are separated for certain specific objects and purposes. There was always a head of a city. He might be a king, or a mayor, or some other appointed leader, but there is always a head. There is always a head of state. There is always a king in a kingdom.

The citizens of a kingdom are those who are bound together by a common allegiance to this state, to this king, to this supreme authority, president, or whatever he may be called. As citizens, we all acknowledge that there is a common bond, a common allegiance, because we have these common interests together.

We see the importance of this when we apply the concept to the church. We all acknowledge the same Head, the same King—Eternal and Everlasting. We have the same common interests. We recognize the same laws. And because of this, we have a common allegiance to one another.

Sin separates us from God, but it also separates us from one another. As a direct consequence, there are certain things that are specific to us that do not apply to other people. Let me qualify this. It is important to realize that we are not simply talking about the external, visible church. Paul, in the whole context of his statement in Ephesians 2:19, makes it clear that he is thinking spiritually. It expresses itself externally, but the vital thing is the internal principle.

Remember, it is possible to be a member of the visible, external church and yet to be ignorant of knowing Christ, not to be truly, vitally, related to Him. There have always been such people, and there are still such people. They have been brought up in it, it is tradition, and it is something that is part of the social make-up of a person's life. But it is not living. It is not real. This is the problem that some second-, third-, and so on generation Christians have.

This idea of separation has been lost, and people have thought in terms of Christian countries, assuming that everybody in such a country must be a Christian. That is entirely opposed to Paul's teaching. It is not merely the external.

As Christians, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Their Kingdom is not of this world. It is invisible for the time being, but it is very real. That is the second thing. Citizens are people bound together by a common allegiance to a leader and a way of life.

And now, let us look at the third thing which is the privileges of our citizenship of this glorious Kingdom. We are all interested in privileges because we benefit from them, and they link us intimately to God the Father.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...

We are familiar with the type of person who subtly brags that he has them and is untouchable. It is the person who has connections and uses them. Privileges! Everyone seems to want them—and how people like to have them. The result of worldly privileges is partiality, and we know that partiality is a sin.

But what are the privileges of our citizenship in heaven? The first and greatest privilege is this—our King! People brag about their citizenship, and their countries, and about certain things in particular. They quote their history, and talk about their great heroes. They put up monuments to them and write about them. They are proud of their association with them.

But all of that pales into insignificance when compared with our privileges as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Above all else, we glory in the fact that we have a King who is the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Son of God Himself, the King of Heaven.

But let us go on now to consider the sphere of this Kingdom. This is a very important and interesting theme. The sphere of all earthly kingdoms is on earth, and the center, the capital, is always on earth. Many of us belong to the United States, to a union of sovereign states, and we have a capital city, Washington, D.C. That capital pretty much represents the debauchery of the rest of this country. It has consistently been right up there among one or two of the most violent, crime-ridden cities in the United States. I think that it has improved a little bit the last few years, but it is still right up there at the top.

Nations take great pride in that, and often their rivalries and jealousies have brought them into conflict. That shows their appreciation of the privilege, and their pride in the sphere and the extent of their kingdoms. Of course, they are misled, and we heard some of that in Richard's sermon where he showed us the origins of the worldly kingdoms, and what they had wanted to do was conquer and control people. The Kingdom of God has people in it, and a leader, and King who serve more than anyone.

But you remember how Jesus Christ defined and described His own Kingdom in this

respect. He said: "My kingdom is not of this world." He spoke of it as the kingdom of heaven, or "the kingdom of the heavens." And the apostle Paul, in writing to the Philippian members, said this:

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...

We are here on earth, but our spiritual citizenship is there. We are here on earth, but we are only a colony. Our capital is not Washington D.C., but heaven itself at this point. God will bring His throne down to this earth at a later time.

What is the city to which you and I as Christians belong? According to the book of Revelation, it is the New Jerusalem that is going to come down out of heaven and be established on earth—the New Jerusalem!

That is where the King lives, and that is where He is seated at the right hand of God the Father at this moment. Not an earthly Jerusalem, but a heavenly, everlasting Jerusalem. What a privilege to belong to such a great Kingdom, such a wide domain!

But it is not only true to say that the headquarters, the capital, is in heaven. The citizens of this Kingdom are scattered throughout the whole earth. It includes men and women out of "all nations and kingdoms, and people, and tongues."

What a Kingdom! What a sphere! People belonging to great empires have always been filled with pride in the fact that they were Roman, or they were British, and so on. Christians are citizens of a far greater Kingdom—physically and spiritually. Headquarters is in heaven; the King Eternal is Immortal, Invisible, as our very own personal King!

Presently, we are citizens in every kingdom, land, and continent on earth. But wherever we may live, and whatever our nationality may be, it makes no difference. We belong to God and Jesus Christ, and the headquarters is the same—the Heavenly Jerusalem. What a privilege to be citizens in such a city and such a Kingdom, compared to the corrupt systems of this world!

But let me mention another thing. Notice how the apostle Paul mentions our fellow-citizenship:

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners,

but fellow citizens with the saints....

Consider your fellow citizens! Who are they? It is not the nation of Israel because “they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” Paul is thinking of the saints among the children of Israel, hopefully you and me. What Paul means here is what the man who wrote Psalm 87 had in mind in verses 5 and 6:

Psalm 87:5-6 And of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her; And the Most High Himself shall establish her." The Lord will record, When He registers the peoples: "This one was born there."

Do you see what he means? On the natural level, people are proud to belong to a nation that can produce great people: poets, artists, writers, and so on! We are proud to belong to such a nation—so and so was born here, raised in our land. It is not necessarily wrong to have a pride in our nation, although it is getting harder and harder, I am sad to say.

We are fellow citizens with Abraham, the greatest gentleman who has ever lived, the one who was distinguished by being called “the friend of God.” It is a wonderful thing to understand and to know that you belong to the same city and the same Kingdom as Abraham. And not only Abraham, but Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and those faithful men and women of the Old Testament. We belong to that group, we are in the same city, and we have these common interests and this common allegiance. As Christians, we are at one with the apostle Paul, and have his interests at heart, and the same things that moved him move us.

We are no longer in the world, but we belong to this separate Kingdom, this Kingdom of priests, and this holy nation.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

That is where we have come. We belong there. We are no longer a little kingdom on

earth at the foot of Mount Sinai, as Israel was. We have come to the Heavenly Jerusalem, and “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.”

To make this picture complete, the ultimate privilege is to realize something of the future prospects and the future glory of the Kingdom. At the present time, it seems insufficient. The apostle John saw the future glory in vision:

Revelation 11:15-17 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.

You and I are citizens of that Kingdom. It is going to conquer and prevail. And you and I are going to reign with Christ. It is a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. It is a Kingdom that will have no end. It is the everlasting Kingdom of God and of His Christ. And you and I, if we are Christians, are already in it and are already citizens of it—if we are in Christ who is in the Kingdom.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Here in Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul is describing, in a positive manner, the privileges of membership in God's church. Having explained how the two parties, Jews and Gentiles, were brought together, he then shows them both what their position is as members of the church. In order to do this, he uses a number of figures and pictures. The church, he has already said, is like a body. But then he tells us that the church is like a city, a kingdom—and that we are fellow citizens. He says that the church is also like a family, and that we are the household of God. But the church is also like a temple, in which God Himself dwells.

The link between us and the Kingdom of God, and God and us, is so intimately close that we cannot comprehend the actual dwelling within Jesus Christ and God the Father.

And then, we looked at some of the general privileges that belong to us as citizens of such a Kingdom. We reminded ourselves of the character of our King, the extent of His Kingdom, our fellow-citizens, and the future glory of this wondrous Kingdom into which we have been brought.

Now, let us look at some further specific privileges that belong to us as members and citizens of this great Kingdom. There are certain things that we can add to the general privileges that we have already considered. They are quite obvious as we work out this analogy of the church as a Kingdom.

Think, for a moment, of the benefits we enjoy because we are citizens of such a Kingdom. That is one of the first things one thinks of in connection with a kingdom. As a citizen of a country, we enjoy all the benefits of the reign, the rule, and the laws of that particular community.

It has often been the proud boast of citizens of this country that she is the home of freedom. I believe that is the proud boast of the British as well, although both countries are losing that freedom rapidly. Now, those are things that we enjoy as the result of our citizenship in this country. There are people in other countries that do not have these privileges. They are still, more or less, in a dictatorship, or some other state of serfdom, and there are others under awful tyrannies.

One of the best things about citizenship is that it does entitle us to enjoy all the benefits of the system and form of government, and the economy of a particular state. We can relate all of this to the realm of the church. Paul has already reminded us of it in the first chapter of Ephesians:

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...

We receive these spiritual blessings every day in abundance.

That is a summary of all of the blessings of this specific Kingdom. They are endless, and it is impossible to attempt to describe them. But we must hold onto the great principle that all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ are ours.

The Kingdom, the city, to which we belong, is a Kingdom, a city, in which all of these blessings are given freely. It is the King's good pleasure that they are given. He delights in doing it. He is interested in His citizens. He is interested in all of His people. Their welfare holds a special place in His mind and His heart. He is the Father of His people, and He is concerned about our welfare and our well-being in every single respect.

Other statements in the Scriptures, to the same effect, will help us to understand this. The apostle Paul, in I Timothy 4:10, uses the interesting expression, "the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

I Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

The word Savior means "the One who blesses, the One who looks after, and the One who delivers out of trouble." And the Scriptures teach this everywhere concerning God. God "makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." But Paul says, "especially of those who believe," especially you and me.

There are men and women in the world today who never think of God and never mention Him, except to blaspheme His name; nevertheless, they enjoy some of the common, general benefits and blessings of God's Kingdom. God is a wonderfully merciful and blessing God.

All that the people in the world and us have comes from God. He is "the Savior of all men . . . especially of those who believe." He has a personal interest in believers, a special interest and unusual interest in us.

And you and I, as citizens of the Kingdom, are the recipients of these unique benefits, these special blessings that He has for His own people. Everything is ordered for our good.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

God, who controls the whole universe and cosmos, manipulates everything for the good of His own people. Everything is working to this end. God has the control of everything, and as our King, He manipulates all of His resources for our good.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

It is something that is integral to any concept of a kingdom with a king and citizens. In this Kingdom of God and of His Christ to which we belong, all the resources of God are for us. The Old Testament has a lot to say about God's concern for His people. It is still plainer in the New Testament. We are the recipients of all these amazing, untold, unsearchable riches and blessings of God's Kingdom.

Another privilege is that we have the right of access to the King. Under a kingship, even the most helpless citizen in the land has the right of access. Ultimately, he has a right of appeal to the king.

The whole process of the law is there, in a sense, to enable him to exercise that right. He can take his appeal from one authority to a higher authority, and ultimately he can appeal to the king. Now that is true of every one of us as a Christian. We can get on our knees and appeal directly, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, to God the Father.

We have a King, who though He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords and the Ruler of the ends of the earth, knows and is interested in His citizens individually. You and I have a right of access to that King. That King, of course, is Jesus Christ.

We can take our case to Him. Whatever great issue He may be giving His attention, He has the time to listen to us, to hear our appeal, and to deal with our case.

We should never feel lost in the church or in the world in which we live. We should never think that we are so small and insignificant that this supreme King is not interested in us. The whole teaching of the Bible emphasizes the opposite. He is ready and willing to listen to our requests, if they are asked according to His will. There is that qualification. We must ask according to the will of God. I think that it is appropriate for us in every prayer to ask that God's will be done after we make every one of our requests. Because what we ask may not be the best for us, but we know that God's will is.

There are many instances of that in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. When He was on His last journey up to Jerusalem, He was followed by a great crowd. There was a poor blind man who cried out, "Have mercy on me, you Son of David."

The people tried to silence him. "Keep quiet," they said. "He is going to Jerusalem. He

does not have the time to deal with you.” But Jesus heard him, and He had time to stop and to speak to him, and to heal him, and to deliver him. As important as His task was when He was on earth, He had the time to personally intervene on a person’s behalf.

He, likewise, had time for Zacchaeus. He also had time to deal with another blind man at the gate of the Temple. It did not matter where He was, or how great the crowd was. Also, we remember the woman with the issue of blood who touched His garment as He was going to resurrect a child. He had time to turn around and acknowledge her.

There you have illustrations of His care and kindness for people. In your need and in your desperation, always remember that, as a citizen of this Kingdom, you are known to your King, and that He is always ready to listen to your appeal, and to pay attention to your cry.

Let us consider another privilege. The resources of the Kingdom are shared among us. I referred to this matter when we looked at our fellow citizenship with the saints, but we only looked at it from the standpoint of its greatness. It is very precious to us from the practical standpoint.

The fellowship that we enjoy with our fellow citizens is a great pleasure. Certainly, it is precious to us that as fellow-citizens together, as members of the church together, we know and experience this in practice. Is there anything more encouraging to a Christian than to know that he is being prayed for by others, and that other people have your burden and your problem on their hearts and minds, and are making intercession for you? They do not only think of themselves. You are a fellow citizen, and you belong together. We pray for one another, we sympathize with one another, and we understand one another’s trials and tribulations, because we have been through them at times.

There have been times when we all have felt that we can scarcely pray, that we have been discouraged, and perhaps Satan has been especially busy against us. At times such as these, we tend to be forgetful of the fact that we have this right of access immediately to the King Himself.

While we are commiserating with ourselves, we meet another Christian, and as we begin to talk, we realize that he or she has the same problem or difficulty. Immediately, we are eased and helped, and even somewhat relieved. And so, we go forward together. We bear one another’s burdens.

Romans 15:1-6 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for

his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We are going through life together through a strange land. It is a wonderful thing to realize that the resources of others, the strength and the ability of others, become available to us in our difficulties. And when they, in turn, are depressed and we are joyful, we can help them. There is an amazing fellowship amongst fellow citizens.

Let us consider another privilege, another great source of comfort, namely, the protection that the Kingdom provides us. This is an extraordinary thing. It is true on the secular level. All the power and all the might and all the resources of a kingdom are behind the poor, helpless citizen and are available for his defense.

Isaiah 25:4 For You [God] have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat...

When we apply it to the realm of the church, all of this is even more true. We can take certain Old Testament examples. King Solomon writes about a man of God who is hard pressed, and his enemies are surrounding and attacking him. What action can he take when that happens?

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

There is a wonderful description of this in Psalm 3, where the psalmist tells us of how he was surrounded by all kinds of dangers and by desperate enemies. And yet, this is how he writes:

Psalm 3:3-8 But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who

lifts up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord; Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah

Zechariah puts it like this:

Zechariah 2:8-9 For thus says the Lord of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. [The Eternal is talking about every single member of His church—"the apple of His eye."] For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me.

Whoever assaults the Lord's people assaults the apple of His eye, that is, the pupil, one of the most sensitive parts of the anatomy. Do you want anything beyond that? God protects us even more carefully than a person protects the most sensitive place on his own body. He protects us as if it was the pupil of His own eye that was in danger. That is tremendous protection!

John 10:28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Is there a safer place than that?

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Hebrews 13:6 So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

I John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

All the power and all the resources of the Kingdom of God are behind the citizens of heaven and are available for our defense. We must realize our abundant privileges as Christians—as members and citizens of God’s church.

Another aspect that is equally important for us is the calls, the demands, and the responsibilities of our citizenship. We have been rejoicing in the privileges, and now we have to remember our responsibilities.

The whole of the second half of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians is dedicated to our responsibilities almost exclusively. But let us remind ourselves, briefly, of some of the things that follow because of our privileged and exalted position. They will also provide us with very subtle and delicate tests as to whether we belong to the Kingdom or not.

The first is obviously this—our pride in the Kingdom. The human analogy is obvious—our pride of citizenship! It is natural and instinctive for people to speak for their country, and shout and sing for it. They will also die for it.

Citizens do this for anything in which they are interested. A person interested in music is always talking about it! A man interested in football will shout in support of his team! They are interested in their side. If they are not content with just that, they wear mascot hats, T-shirts, and special team colors, and they pay tremendous amounts of money for tickets to the big game. The enthusiasm and the excitement show the realm of their interest.

We are citizens of a Kingdom that does not belong to this world—the heavenly Kingdom. Are we righteously proud of it? Or do we, when we are in the company of certain people, try to conceal the fact that we are Christians? Are we ashamed of Christ and His teachings?

Luke 9:26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.

But it is not only a matter of not being ashamed. If we realize the truth about our position, we should be motivated by it, and we should be thrilled by it. Like the patriot says, “This land is my land.” The same holds true, but at a higher spiritual level, for God’s church, and for His Kingdom. We should be thankful for our Kingdom and praise it; and we should be willing to die for it.

Psalms 145:10-13 All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You [i.e., proclaim praise]. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, And talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, And the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

We should extol it and its virtues and all its great and glorious privileges, and we should be anxious that everyone knows that we belong to it. We should feel a righteous pride in this glorious, spiritual Kingdom in which we are citizens and members of the Family of God, forever showing our allegiance, and glorying in the fact that we belong to such a Kingdom. What is the best way to extol its virtues? It is to live God's way of life by our example and by our true witness. That is the best way to express God's way of life, and the glory of His Kingdom.

The second principle of our responsibility is country before self. That is the test of a person's true appreciation of citizenship. When the country is in trouble, the cry is, "For country!"—and not for our own particular interests and concerns. The apostle Paul has something to say about this:

II Timothy 2:3-4 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Paul means that when a man is a soldier in the army, he is not, at the same time, in a profession or a business outside the army. He is entirely at the disposal of his Commanding Officer, his legitimate Commander-in-Chief, and country.

The soldier who is not dedicated to his duty causes chaos in his unit. If a number of men in an army, when the country is at war, suddenly begin to say, "I am sorry I cannot fight today. I have to go home and take care of some business," the army would soon be defeated. Soldiers have had to sign themselves away; they have handed themselves over to their legitimate Commander-in-Chief and country. That is what we do when we are baptized. We accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. That is our contract, and it is unbreakable.

Apply that thought to the higher realm. No soldier, when in service, gets entangled in the enticements of civilian life; his aim is to satisfy and please the One who enlisted him.

The King and the Kingdom come first. And the test of whether we realize our citizenship is in this Kingdom is just that. Have we surrendered to the King and His Kingdom? Have we realized that we are not our own?

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

We belong to Him. We are no longer our own. We have no right to make decisions against His Law and against His life.

The third principle in this logical sequence is, because of my relationship to this Kingdom it follows that I am now a stranger in every other kingdom. Remember what Paul says:

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...

We used to be outside of this Kingdom, strangers and foreigners, but now we are citizens of the Kingdom. But this means that we are now a stranger and a foreigner in the country out of which we have come. What an important principle this is! Let me remind you of the way that the apostle Peter uses this principle:

I Peter 2:10-11 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...

Do you see the change? They were not a people, but they are now a people. They were without the Kingdom, strangers and foreigners outside the Kingdom of God; they are now inside the Kingdom of God. But because of that, he says, you are strangers and pilgrims in this world, and you no longer belong to it.

It is another way of saying what Paul says in Philippians 3:

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also

eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Because our citizenship is in heaven, we are strangers here. We are in the world, but we do not belong to the world. This is something that happens automatically. When we are visiting another country, we do not become a part of that country. We are still strangers, we are conscious of it, and so is everybody else. And you and I, as Christians, have become strangers in this world.

We do not belong to this world any longer, if we are truly Christian. We are like people away from home—we are here for a while, we are sojourners, and we are travelers. That is the picture that is used to describe us in the Bible.

The faithful people, mentioned in Hebrews 11, had counted themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They were looking for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We are strangers and pilgrims among the ungodly. They do not understand us. They are different. They may be antagonistic. They may persecute us. We are either in God's Kingdom or else we are outside; we cannot be in both at the same time.

Let us look at the fourth principle. As strangers, pilgrims, and foreigners in this world, always remember that the first call upon us is that we represent our King and His Kingdom. The citizen of the Roman Empire in ancient days, wherever he went, carried his personal cloak. It was the sign of the fact that he was a Roman citizen, and he was careful of it and of its honor.

The apostle Paul had something to say to the Philippians regarding Christian behavior:

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

We are strangers away from home, we know what we claim, and we have told people what we are. Remember, they are watching us. Never forget it. They will judge our King and our country by what they see in us, by the witness we give.

Proverbs 14:25 A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies.

The world will persecute us as evildoers, but we must prove to them by our true witness that we are citizens of heaven. It is an issue of holiness!

I Peter 1:15-16 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

If we are not living a sanctified and a holy life, we are traitors to our own country and to our King. We have no right to live as we like. We cannot disassociate ourselves from our citizenship. We cannot say, "It does not matter to anybody else what I do. I will live my life my own way."

If you fall, we all fall with you, and the world laughs at us all. Worst of all, Christ is ridiculed. For a member of God's church to live a worldly life is nothing but to be a hypocrite and a traitor to the Kingdom of God. In the secular realm, people used to be shot dead for doing things like that. Siding with the enemy! Insulting the flag!

You and I are citizens of this heavenly King and His glorious, holy Kingdom. As strangers and pilgrims, keep clear of fleshly lusts that war against the soul; not for your own sakes only, but for the sake of those watching, and for the honor of your King, and the for benefit and glory and blessing of fellow citizens.

Let your whole conduct be governed by the inspired written Word of God. All of our actions should be controlled by that. We must ask ourselves, "Does my conduct provide a true witness for God's way of life, the way of His Kingdom?"

Finally, it should be obvious that as a citizen of God's Kingdom we should always be concerned about the defense of the Kingdom, the defense of her laws, and the defense of everything for which she stands. We must be ready to die in defense of it! Paul admonishes Timothy:

I Timothy 6:20 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge —

In the spiritual sense, we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints. In a day like this, we are called upon to defend the inspired written Word of God—the Bible. It is being attacked and ridiculed like never before in the history of

mankind.

To defend God's Word, we have to study it. To start with, we have to know the Bible inside and out. Good will and good intentions do not defend a country. A man defending his country has to go into the army and be trained, drilled, and disciplined, whether he likes it or not. And you and I have to be trained and disciplined to be ready to defend our heavenly country, the Kingdom of God.

Our Book is being attacked, our way of life is being attacked, our Lord and Master and King, and our Supreme God are being attacked by spiritual and worldly principalities and powers.

I Peter 3:15-16 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

The Kingdom is being attacked by a mighty spiritual adversary, and you and I are called upon as Christian soldiers to play our individual parts. There is no greater honor, no higher privilege, and no more important responsibility. Victory is certain and assured.

It would be a tragic thing, when the great and glorious day of celebration comes, if any one of us feel that we have accomplished nothing at all, that we merely sat by while somebody else did the work of studying, praying, overcoming, serving, and supporting one another and the church in various ways. Who is doing the defending, the fighting, and the laboring?

We do not all have to be great experts in the art of war. We are not all meant to be full-time workers in the ministry and the physical administration of the church. We may be called upon to jump to her defense in whatever little service we can provide.

As citizens of this Kingdom, our greatest desire, our chief ambition, should always be to see her becoming spiritually stronger and stronger and still more glorious, until that day when: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Today, "You are no longer strangers and foreigners [to God's Kingdom and His Church], but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

And for that reason, we are just strangers and pilgrims in this world, with all its artificiality and superficiality, and all its mad self-confidence that will come to nothing.

We can be thankful we do not belong to that. We are just strangers in the world—but our citizenship is in heaven. In the world we are traveling on a passport, but in the world to come, when the Kingdom of God is set up here on earth, our citizenship in heaven will be known to all!