

## **Christian Identity: Who You Are in Christ**

### **Lesson 6: Citizen**

There is a lot of controversy these days regarding non-citizens living in the US. Some non-citizens are here legally; they followed the law and live here lawfully. Others did not follow the law; they came into the country illegally and remain here illegally. It seems like some of our elected officials are in favor of allowing illegal immigrants to live here.

Those of us who were born in this country should appreciate the great privilege of citizenship in the US. In spite of its many flaws and failures, the US is still a good country to live in. It could be much better; and we hope that it will be better in the future. All things considered, I'm glad to be a citizen of the USA.

But that's not the only place that I hold citizenship. The Christian is a citizen of two realms, one physical and one spiritual. One is an earthly political establishment, the other is a spiritual kingdom. We are citizens of both the earth and of heaven. We have earthly, political responsibilities, and we have heavenly, spiritual responsibilities. And we dare not ignore or neglect either set of duties.

Unfortunately, conflicts often erupt between these two realms. Earthly values conflict with heavenly values. Earthly life crowds out heavenly life. When the value systems of the two kingdoms collide, which value system do we follow? Which is more important to us—citizenship in the US or citizenship in heaven? Do we have a higher allegiance to our earthly country or to our heavenly home?

We would do well to consider with which realm our ultimate loyalties lie. Our citizenship in heaven should be our most valuable citizenship. Our highest loyalty is to God, and our true and eternal home is in heaven.

Today we are continuing our Summer Sermon Series on Christian identity. Our focus today is on our identity as dual citizens. We maintain citizenship here on earth, and we hold citizenship in heaven. We have a physical home and a spiritual home. We have obligations and responsibilities in both realms. We identify with both the physical world and the heavenly kingdom.

Let's consider our dual citizenship and how that affects our identity.

I. Christians are citizens of a heavenly, spiritual kingdom.

Who am I? If I'm a Christian, I am a citizen of heaven.

A. Texts

1. Philippians 3:20 *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Christ*
  - a) The word for “citizenship” here (“conversation” in the KJV) is *politeuma*; it signifies “an act of administration” or “a form of government.” It may be translated “citizenship, community, or commonwealth.” One translation (Moffat) renders this clause, “We are a colony of Heaven.”
  - b) The related root word also occurs in Philippians 1:27 *Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...* “Let your conduct be” could be translated “live as a citizen.”<sup>1</sup>
2. Colossians 1:13 *[God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*
  - a) “Power” here has the sense of “authority.” The power in this case is satanic, not political. Before we are saved, we are under the power of darkness; we are part of the realm of Satan; we are part of this evil world system under satanic control.
  - b) But God has delivered or rescued us from this power/authority/dominion and transported us (literally “carried across the border”) into the kingdom of His Son.  
**App:** I wonder if you have been delivered from the authority of Satan and carried across the border into the kingdom of Jesus Christ? Spiritually speaking, you are in one kingdom or the other.
3. Ephesians 2:12 *at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*
  - a) The word “commonwealth” here *politeia*, meaning “citizenry.” It refers to the administration of civil affairs, citizenship, or the rights of a citizen.

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Witmer, “The Man with Two Countries,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (1976): 339.

- b) The unsaved are “aliens” from citizenship among God’s people. They are outside the covenants and estranged from the promises.
- c) Salvation changes that status. Believers become *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God* (Eph 2:19).
- d) Entrance into this citizenship is granted only by being born again (John 3:3, 5, 7). All Christians have this citizenship; we are all spiritually citizens of heaven; that is our true and eternal home. We’ll spend much more time in heaven than we’ll spend on earth.

B. Implications of spiritual citizenship

1. My ultimate loyalty is not to a nation, state, or political leader. As much as I may feel patriotic support for politicians, political parties, or nations, I know that my highest sense of loyalty is to Christ and his kingdom (Mt 6:33).

2. We must not confuse Christianity with American patriotism. As much as we may love and celebrate our country, America is not God’s country and the constitution is not the Bible. American patriotism is not a Christian doctrine, nor should Christians confuse loyalty to *country* with loyalty to *Christ*. American citizenship and heavenly citizenship are two different things.

I can foresee a time when I am no longer patriotic. If things keep going the way that they are morally in our country, being patriotic is going to be more and more difficult. We can always celebrate the founding of our country, but I find it very difficult to celebrate the current condition of our country, and I have decreasing faith in our political leaders.

I am often disappointed with this nation and our political leaders. But I’ll never be disappointed in heaven. The kingdom of God is perfect, and I am always glad to be a citizen of God’s kingdom.

3. Because my citizenship is in heaven, I am merely a sojourner (or pilgrim/resident alien) in this world.

Hebrews 11:13 [We confess that we are] *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*.

1 Peter 2:11 ... *I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, ...*

I'm a citizen of this world, but I'm also a pilgrim and a stranger here. This is not my final or permanent home. I'm obligated to fulfill my responsibilities as a citizen of this country, but that's not my highest set of duties.

“This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through...”

4. I do not feel entirely comfortable in this world. As the culture moves farther away from biblical principles, I am increasingly disappointed with the direction the world seems to be heading. I cannot trust politicians to provide for or protect the church and/or Christian values (like they once did). In fact, as the country strays away from its biblical moorings, we should expect increasing opposition from worldly authorities.
5. When conflicts arise between my spiritual and political responsibilities, my spiritual citizenship takes priority. Spiritual and moral principles are more significant than earthly political circumstances.

I am very concerned about life here and now. I want to support biblical values and support those politicians and policies that will lead to the most good for the most people. It truly saddens me to see our country reject what made it great in the first place.

However, my thoughts and interests now incline to “things above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-3). I'm more concerned about moral and spiritual issues than earthly, political ones. Our great hope and confidence is in God, his word, his church, and his plan, not in the world of politics.

6. We look forward to the time when “the kingdoms of this world [shall] become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev 11:15).

**Trans:** If you are a Christian, your highest loyalty must be to your spiritual citizenship. You are a member of Christ's kingdom, a citizen of heaven. That your primary identity. You may be a card-carrying, active, committed member of a political party, but that cannot be your highest identification. You are a citizen of heaven; you are a citizen of God's kingdom—that's your identity.

## II. Christians are citizens of an earthly physical/political realm.

There are a number of NT texts that pertain to our citizenship in a country or a location.

### A. Texts

1. Jesus expected his disciples to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:21). Some things in life belong to Caesar’s realm, while other things belong to God. We must recognize an earthly, political part of life.
2. Paul knew his rights as a Roman citizen and used his privileges. When he and Silas were mistreated in Philippi, they appealed to the fact that they were Roman citizens (Acts 16:23-39). Paul relied on his citizenship of the Roman Empire when he appealed to certain protections that citizens enjoyed (Acts 22:24-28).
3. When government officials could not seem to come to a verdict regarding Paul’s case, he appealed to Caesar, a privilege he enjoyed as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:12).
4. In Romans 13, Paul clearly calls believers to submit themselves to the “powers that be” because they are “ordained of God.”  
*Titus 3:1 ... be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,*  
*1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*
5. Christians agree that legitimate political authorities have the right to rule over their citizens. Christians should strive to be good citizens of the countries in which they live.
6. Christians are responsible to pray for those in authority (1 Tim 2:1-2). Perhaps part of the reason that we have such bad political leaders is our lack of prayer for them.
7. We also know that, in rare instances, obeying God requires disobeying man (Acts 5:29). Cf. also Dan 3, 6.

### B. Implications of earthly citizenship

1. Christians have dual citizenship—on earth and in heaven, physical and spiritual. Some deny the idea that Christians are really citizens here on earth, but the NT seems to imply it clearly.

2. Christians should strive to be good citizens of the country in which we live. That means that we should inform ourselves about current political issues and vote for those who would most likely uphold and defend biblical values. We should care about the quality of life here in our local community, in our state, and in our country.
3. Good citizenship also means following the rules and laws of society. We must honor those in office, pay our taxes and fees, and generally support the efforts of those in authority to maintain law and order.

**Quote:** It is part of the Christian's responsibility as a citizen of heaven to be obedient as a citizen of an earthly government.<sup>2</sup>

Citizenship here on earth is often not very convenient or enjoyable. I'd rather avoid some of the duties of earthly citizenship.

4. If authorities require that we violate Scripture, or if they prevent us from obeying Scripture, civil disobedience is allowed. That is, we need not obey laws that violate higher, biblical laws.
5. We cannot deny our political responsibilities on the basis of our spiritual citizenship. Some Christian groups emphasize our spiritual citizenship to the exclusion of our earthly citizenship. They refuse to salute the flag, serve in the military, or vote, based on the fact that their loyalty is to God's kingdom, not man's. Others refuse to obey the laws or pay their taxes and the same grounds. Such a position misunderstands the dual citizenship believers hold.
6. Likewise, we should not be indifferent/uncaring about our political influence. Some believers refuse to become involved in political action because they see politics as "dirty" or ineffective. Others are so preoccupied with spiritual matters that they fail to participate in earthly affairs.

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<sup>2</sup> John A. Witmer, "The Man with Two Countries," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (1976): 346.

Without Christian influence, the worst politicians are often elected and the worst policies are put in place. Christians should seek to inform themselves on the issues, support the better candidates, vote, and hold their elected officials accountable. Christians should seek to be salt and light within the political realm (Mt 5:13-14). We should work to install good people and change bad laws.

Examples: Joseph and Daniel worked within the political structures of pagan, foreign nations. Both were spiritually minded and still operated within the earthly political systems.

A present-day example would be the overturning of the Roe v. Wade decision. That SC decision was overturned as the result of many years of Christian political involvement. If people like us are not involved, then the other side will always remain in power and install their evil policies. So we have to be involved.

Christians should identify first and foremost with Christ and His church, not with any political movement or even any nation. Our main loyalty must be to Christ, His Word, and His church. We are above all things citizens of heaven, and only secondarily citizen of a political structure on earth.

It is proper to identify ourselves as citizens of the land in which we live. We should be glad to be Americans and sad that America is declining so quickly. We should do whatever we can to reverse the wrong-headed political trends in our nation and use our influence to turn it back to the right direction. Even though our highest citizenship is in heaven, we should use our citizenship here to make positive political changes. We should be engaged in the political process and not just leave it to the heathen and the atheists. We should pray fervently for our nation and our leaders.

**Quote:** God has called the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ into a unique position. God desires the Christian to function to His glory as both a citizen of heaven and a citizen of an earthly country. Problems and tensions will exist, and perhaps even direct conflict will develop; but God has provided guidelines in the Scriptures, and by the Holy Spirit He will lead the believer to live in both realms to the fulfillment of His will.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John A. Witmer, "The Man with Two Countries," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (1976): 349.

How do we identify ourselves? As citizens of both heaven and earth. We are US citizens, yet our citizenship is in heaven. While we are here, we should be good citizens and use our influence for good. But our true, final, and highest allegiance is to the heavenly kingdom. We identify first and foremost as citizens of heaven. We want a heavenly value system installed here on earth, and we work toward that end.

