

## Citizenship

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This was the number of the “Green” card I received at the age of 5 when my parents moved from Canada to the US. Being a Permanent Resident, or Resident alien gave me some, but not all, of the rights of a citizen: I could work legally in the US, though some jobs were not available, I paid taxes, I paid into SSI towards my retirement, but I couldn’t vote and couldn’t serve on a jury.

Then in the mid ‘90’s, I became a Naturalized Citizen. I filled out a form, paid the fee, took a written test and a personal interview, and then took an oath, which included the words:

*absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen*

Thus becoming a fully naturalized citizen with even more rights and privileges.

Today’s scripture reading tells of a situation where Paul’s citizenship became an important issue. He was being brought before the Romans by the Jews, and was being interrogated, when the following discussion took place:

Acts 22:25-28

But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?” When the centurion heard *this*, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.” The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.” The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I was actually born *a citizen*.” Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

Scripture tells us of a Roman centurion who trusted Christ to save his servant, and another who recognized at his crucifixion that he was an innocent man. But nowhere in scripture do we read of Roman centurions or commanders ever being afraid. They recognized the power of citizenship as a most significant consideration. And being born a citizen has an irrefutable distinction.

So, as born again Christians, where is our citizenship?

Jesus does provide some insight to this question as he was being questioned by Pontius Pilate:

John 18:33-36

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “**Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?**” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is

not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.””

Our citizenship is now in heaven. And being born into it has now given us ALL the rights and privileges!! In Ephesians, Paul reminds us of this:

Eph 2:19-20

““So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,”

And since we are both “born” into citizenship, as well as this citizenship having been “purchased” by the sacrificial death of Christ, he tells us that it is available to all, for free!!

Romans 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Now while this citizenship is free to receive, Christ warns us that it comes with a cost to possess:

John 15:19

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

So how are we to react to the world’s hatred of us? Again, Paul has a warning of what our perspective should be:

Romans 12:2

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

While we may be “in” the world, we should always remember we are not to be “of” the world.

Our word holidays is a secular version of the words “holy days”. And because of the secular nature, Christmas and Halloween celebrations provide a level of discomfort for some believers. They feel participation by believers is crossing the line into being “of” the world.

So does this mean that our patriotic holidays are “wrong” to celebrate? It certainly might seem so. Between the raucous festivities, drinking, playing with explosive devices, there are plenty of wrong ways to celebrate the birth of the nation.

However, the answer is, no, not at all. In fact Paul reminds us that celebrating the 4th of July can be an opportunity for believers, as he shares the model of service he employed in trying to lead people into an understanding of Christ’s importance in their lives.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

It is always important to remember that the reading and studying of “all” scripture, to keep everything in context, is our ultimate goal. We are not to find select scriptures to back our position, while ignoring those passages that would demonstrate that our position is actually flawed.

So, let us all follow Paul’s example...

To Americans, we are fellow Americans. Let us join them in celebration, develop relationships, so we may share with them the good news of our new “homeland.”

To those who are aliens, we too have a citizenship that is from somewhere else, so we may join them in fellowship, develop relationships, and share with them the good news of our new “homeland”, doing “all these things for the sake of the gospel”, so that we “may become fellow partakers of it.”

A few years back I was headed to Canada to visit with family after the death of one of our cousins. Crossing the border at customs at 3AM, it was me and a sole customs agent. I handed him my passport and explained that I was staying for only a couple of days before returning to the US. As he had noted on my passport that I was a fellow Canadian by birth, his final words as he returned my passport were: “And since you were born here, you can stay as long as you want.”

Let us make use of both of our citizenships, to gather others to come to know Christ and receive a new citizenship, where we will all stay with him for all of eternity.