

“CITIZENSHIP”

Romans 13:1-10

In ancient Greece, people were citizens of a particular city-state such as Athens or Sparta. Not everyone was a citizen. Women and slaves weren't citizens. Among the Jews, and many ancient people, citizenship was determined by your tribe. The Roman Empire brought the first instance of national citizenship. After the Roman Empire collapsed, citizenship was defined by the city you lived in or your feudal lord.

There have always been groups whose allegiance was to a group that did not acknowledge citizenship to a nation. The Roma or Gypsies are one such group. The Cossacks were such a group.

Citizenship has become a hot button political issue in this country and as unemployment increases, it will become even hotter. There are 12-20 million illegal, undocumented aliens in this country. I couldn't find figures on documented aliens – student visas, work visas, legal immigrants, etc. Among the illegal aliens there are hundreds of thousands who are brought here against their will, kept in virtual slavery working in the sex trade, as domestic servants, in sweat shops.

The presence of illegal aliens presents difficult social problems. What extent of health care should they receive at taxpayers' expense, what about their children in schools? How do you make someone pay income taxes if their presence in this country is hidden? Should illegal aliens be issued driver's licenses? There are no easy answers to these questions.

What are our responsibilities as citizens of the United States? What are our responsibilities as citizens of heaven? How do we manage our dual citizenships? What do we do when they seem to conflict?

1.) Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

(Romans 13:1-7 NKJV)

Paul recognizes that not everyone he was writing to was a citizen.

Citizenship was a valued asset in Paul's time.

The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." (Acts 22:28 NKJV)

Paul's instructions are for every soul – slave or free, Greek, Roman or Jew – everyone breathing is subject to the governing authorities.

Paul refers to the governing authorities as higher powers. They are not the highest power. God is highest. He appointed them and they will be held accountable by Him. Living in a democracy makes us think of them as accountable to us. They are accountable to us on election day. After that they are accountable to God. Their authority derives from Him. Three times Paul refers to them as God's ministers. He says that if we resist them, we are resisting the ordinance of God and will bring God's judgment on ourselves.

Paul was aware that the governing authorities of his time were heathens, pagans, persecuting Christians. Even so, Christians are not only to obey but to support the governing officials. We should pay taxes. We are not to withhold taxes because we oppose some policy of government. We should salute the flag, honor our leaders, fear them.

2.) 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 NKJV)

Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" In His teachings Jesus referred countless times to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. In His parables about the end of the age, He referred to the King coming, sitting on His throne, and judging all mankind. Before Jesus' coming, the prophets spoke of a day when the Lord would come to earth and rule all the earth.

Every nation or kingdom has a record of who are citizens. In order to get a passport from the State Department, you have to show a copy of a public record that you are a citizen by birth or by naturalization.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him. (Malachi 3:16-18 NKJV)
And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books....And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:12,15 NKJV)

When we were born again, our citizenship was recorded in heaven in the Lamb's Book of Life. Now that we are citizens of heaven we have duties, just as our earthly citizenship has duties. When I was eighteen, I had to register for the draft. I volunteered for military service but I could have been drafted. As soon as I started earning money, I had a duty to pay taxes. I have a civic duty to vote, to serve on juries, to obey the laws, to salute the flag, to give honor to my leaders.

As a citizen of heaven, it is my duty to love God and to love my neighbor, to obey His laws, to serve Him faithfully, to be in worship every Sunday, to pray and read the Bible daily, to seek to know and then to do His will, to tithe my income.

3.) If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small. Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds? (Proverbs 24:10-12 NKJV)

What do we do when our duties as citizens of our nation seem to conflict with our duties as citizens of heaven? The passage I read from Proverbs persuaded some Germans, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to try to overthrow the rule of Adolph Hitler because of his persecution of the Jews. That plot was called *Valkyrie* and it is the subject of a recent motion picture. Bonhoeffer withdrew when it became a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. He was still sent to prison for his part in it.

Moses did not try to overthrow Pharaoh, the Jews did not rebel against their Babylonian captors. Neither Jesus nor Paul called upon Christians to fight against the Romans.

In Ephesians 6 Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood but the powers of darkness. Our weapons are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of,..." *Tennyson* "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16b NKJV) Why then can you get a larger crowd of Christians to march around outside an office or the Capitol waving signs and shouting slogans, than you can to gather in prayer meeting?

