

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **A New Citizenship Philippians 3:20, 21**

There is something refreshing about other countries, even the ones that are governed by evil dictators or godless ideologies. It is the fact that the people that belong to these countries are all unique yet all possess common identity in terms of belonging to a particular country. They are called citizens. As citizens they possess rights in their particular countries that someone who is a citizen does not. For instance, they can generally vote and choose their kind of government. Language(s) are unique to some countries making their people unique. Some countries have multiple languages yet its citizenships are bound together because they were born in that country. Language may separate them, yet they are viewed as belonging to one country with all its rights and privileges. Certain rights apply to citizens by nature of citizenship. Every country operates in this way. Religious ideologies do not operate this way. We live in a present time when religion binds people beyond their citizenship. People from different countries are united under the banner of religion, sometimes even speaking different languages from each other. In one sense this is absolutely true for the Christian. He or she belongs to another country where they possess another citizenship.

Citizenship occurs in two ways primarily. It is either by birth or by naturalization. It also occurs by extension or relationship. If one of your parents is the citizen of another country other than the one you were born in, you might be able to claim the citizenship of the parent. Earthly citizenship entails certain responsibilities and privileges. If you abuse those rights and privileges you will be subject to the laws of that country. That is why treason is viewed so distastefully, strongly and with the understanding that there will be consequences and ramifications. It is because a person has abused the privileges and despised them. This is seen in Esau's action in despising his birthright. We inherently recoil at Esau's action. We recognize that he is in the wrong and we don't like it.

Heavenly citizenship is on a far grander scale than earthly citizenship. In fact, the only common denominator is the word 'citizenship.' The Christian's true citizenship is in heaven and not on earth. Earthly citizenship has nothing on heavenly citizenship. There is simply no comparison. What is striking about this lack of similarity is the fact that we seem to prefer the earthly over the heavenly. Are you happy to go to heaven because your loved ones are there? Are you happy to go to heaven because your sins have been forgiven and you have escaped hell itself? Would you be happy to go to heaven if God were not there? What if your loved ones were in heaven and God were not there? Where would you rather be? With them or with God! Now I recognize the impossibility of such a situation. There can be no heaven if God is not there, but it does suggest that we cling to earth more than we desire heaven.

When Paul thinks about our citizenship as being in heaven, he is thinking about the great transaction and transformation that has occurred in the believer's life. The Christian is a new creature in Christ Jesus. Sins are forgiven and washed away by the blood of Jesus. We have the Holy Spirit within us. We have an inheritance that is kept in heaven for us (1Pet. 1:4). If you knew that you were to inherit a fortune on earth, you might do everything in your power to stay alive in order to enjoy that fortune. Paul states that he would rather depart and be with Christ which he says is far better (Phil. 1:23).

This transformation is evident in Paul's mind when you consider the previous verses to Philippians 3:20, 21. Paul says there are enemies to the Cross of Christ (vs. 18). They have set their affections on earthly

things (vs. 19). They think they are headed for heaven, but their end is destruction (vs. 19). Their god is their belly and they delight in their shameful life (vs. 19). Sin is precious to them. They will not let it go. Instead of being ashamed, they take pride and glory in their sins. Paul says they are enemies of the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

It is this conduct that is out of place in heaven or for heavenly citizens who live on earth. The Philippians might have been tempted to think of Rome as their native land. Roman citizenship meant much to the Philippians – they regarded themselves as a little Rome (Acts 16:12, 21, 37 – 39). Their names were enrolled in Roman records. Their dress was Roman and their language was Latin. Their laws were Roman. They were protected by Rome and ruled by Rome and they loved it.

Paul says to these Philippians that they must lift their eyes beyond their earthly citizenship with all its benefits and rights to that far off country of which they are truly citizens. This is what Abraham did (Heb.11:10). This was the attitude of all who died in faith (Heb. 11:13 – 16). They desired a better country which was heavenly in character. As far as they were concerned, they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth journeying to their homeland (1 Pet. 2:11). This is how Paul wants the Philippians to think. Such thinking has practical benefit. It strengthens us for suffering. It prepares our minds and hearts with fortitude and resilience. This is why heavenly thinking overshadows and outweighs earthly thinking (Col. 3:1 – 17).

When Paul speaks of our heavenly citizenship, he has in mind the truth that we are born from above (John 3:3). Heaven gave us birth. Our names are enrolled on the heavenly register. Our lives are governed by heaven's laws based on heaven's standard. Our rights are fixed in heaven. Christ is promoting the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem as He sits at the Father's right hand. His mind is on us and for our good. Though we are away from heaven, He knows that is our home. He has gone there to prepare that home for us (John 14:2).

We are fellow-citizens with all the saints of God and are members of God's household (Eph. 2:19). You would be inclined to think that Christ is waiting for us in heaven, but notice how Paul puts it in verse 20. We are waiting for Christ to come from heaven for us. The reality of heavenly citizenship is magnified by the fact that our King will come to take us to Himself. This is the hope that we have. We are awaiting the Savior because He is going to do something for us. He is going to transform our bodies so that they will like His glorious body (vs. 21). The word that is used to describe our waiting is an eager looking. We are eagerly looking out for Jesus. Is this really true of us? We have to keep reminding ourselves of this truth because the lure of earth is so powerful and dominant upon us.

How is Jesus going to be able to transform our bodies? Verse 21 tells us that it is by the same power that Christ causes all things to be subject to Him. If Christ can subject the totality of the universe's powers to Himself, He can certainly transform the bodies of all the saints in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52). Our transformed bodies will be like His glorified resurrected body. For us this will mean that sin will be gone. The hindrances that we experience now will be gone forever. Only those who have the proper wedding clothes shall enter the Wedding feast of the King (Matt. 22:1 – 14).

The citizens of the heavenly city are to look away from sinful pleasures. We are to look with eager anticipation for the coming of the King from that heavenly country. We are to patiently endure (Rom. 8:25) and wait for the glorious manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven (1 Cor. 1:7; Col. 3:4; Gal. 5:5; Heb. 9:28) bringing us to complete salvation. We are to be yearning for our Savior (vs. 20). This is how we long to see Jesus – as our glorified Lord and Savior who has prepared a home for us, and who then shall come for us. Are we eagerly waiting for that great day?

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