

The Christian's Citizenship

by Tim Conway

This sermon focuses on Ephesians 2:18-22, emphasizing the identity of believers as fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. The speaker highlights the importance of living as representatives of the heavenly kingdom, walking in freedom and righteousness as citizens of a heavenly country. The message encourages believers to align their conduct with their heavenly citizenship, seeking to purify themselves in anticipation of dwelling among perfect saints and Christ in eternity.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:19, Hebrews 11:13, Hebrews 12:22, 1 Peter 2:11, 1 John 3:2, Daniel 2:44

Topics: "Heavenly Citizenship", "Living Righteously"

Description

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Transcript

I'm going to pick up where we left off last week, which is Ephesians 2. We can read v. 18 through the end. We're specifically going to be looking at something there in v. 19 once again. Let's just read these verses.

Ephesians 2, v. 18. Meaning, for through Christ, we both, Jew and Gentile, have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then, conclusion.

You're no longer strangers and aliens. We looked at that last week. No longer strangers and aliens.

Paul affirming that. But, you are fellow citizens with the saints. That's what I want to deal with today.

And members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Now, I am convinced of this. I am convinced that if James and I and any other men who God makes an overseer of this church, I'm convinced that if we're going to pastor the flock of God that is among us, a good deal of our labor, a good deal of words that we communicate to God's people are going to consist of this thing. Reminding people who they are.

I get my cue for this from the Apostle Paul. Why? Because I consider him to be pastoral. An apostle, yes.

Pastoral to the maximum. I mean, this man was gifted. And you know what he did? He spent enormous amounts of his epistles just simply doing that one thing.

Looking Christians in the eyeballs and saying, here's who you are. And maybe we don't think that way pastorally, but that is a huge part of a pastoral labor. Simply to remind people who they are.

Just listen. Just some samplings from Paul. Romans 6.14 You are not under the law, but under grace.

It just states it. That's the reality about you, Christian. 1 Corinthians 3.9 You are God's field.

God's building. 1 Corinthians 3.16 You are God's temple. God's Spirit dwells in you.

1 Corinthians 3.23 You are Christ's, and Christ is God's. 1 Corinthians 6.19-20 You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. 1 Corinthians 12.27 You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Galatians 3.26 In Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. Galatians 4.7 You are no longer a slave, but a son. You get the idea.

He specifically looks at Christians, and although it's not always just that pronoun and that verb, you are, but over and over and over again, what Paul does is exactly what he's been doing in the first two chapters of Ephesians. Think about the first two chapters of Ephesians. If you've been here since the beginning and you try to run through your mind, where are there imperatives? Where are there any commandments given? Where are duties prescribed? What Paul has been doing is telling us, if you Ephesians are Christians, this is what is the reality about you.

He's just been doing nothing but stating what is true about these people, these Ephesians, now that they're Christians, which is precisely what we have before us. Precisely. In verses 18-22, no commandment.

No commandment whatsoever. It's simply this strange apostolic habit of saying to Christians, this is true of you, this is what's true about you, this is what you are. Now, I know right off, this simply does not suit some people.

There are those who want commandments. They sit down to preaching. Preacher, tell me what to do.

Give me the list of do's and don'ts. Give me the how-to's. Tell me how to live my life.

Don't just tell me a bunch of stuff about me. But you see, if we do that, look, Paul gave commandments. He gave imperatives.

There's no question. And we're going to get to those in this letter. But you know what? Even as much as sometimes we think about, oh, yeah, letters like Ephesians, first three chapters, we get all the indicatives, the last three chapters, all the imperatives.

It's not really like that. It's the first three chapters, yes. There's no commandments there.

But then when you get to the last three chapters, it's not like it's all commandments. Even there, it's filled with enormous amounts of indicative verbs. What's that? That's a mood that indicates.

Indicative. Indicate. It indicates what is true.

That's what we have. Some people think preaching isn't practical unless you just get the rules. Listen, the Apostle Paul, who are you going to find that's more practical than him? But what he recognizes is this.

He wants us to know. He wants us to be in tune. You know what's absolutely essential to biblical Christianity is that we think right.

I have often go back to Paul in Romans 6 saying, Christians, you need to reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. You need to consider yourselves dead to sin. And then he says don't let sin reign in your mortal bodies.

But before he gives them a commandment not to let sin reign, he says you need to think about who you are. You are dead to sin. And brethren, I am absolutely convinced that Scripture, the Apostle Paul, takes so much time, so many words to tell us who we are because it's when those truths grip us.

The eyes of our hearts enlightened that you might know. You remember that's how Paul kind of began this section where he talks about praying for them and the things that are true. When he's praying for them, you know what he's praying? I'm praying that you would know what is the hope of your calling.

What are the riches of this glorious inheritance? The immeasurable riches of this or the immeasurable greatness of this power that is at work in you. You see, he wants us to know these realities. This is the same kind of thing that we had before us.

The truth is, Christians need to be reminded over and over and over again as to who they are. Why? Because we need to think. We need to have something going on inside of our minds.

Brethren, I'll tell you what this is all about. Faith is not blind. Faith is meant to work off of truth.

Truth that your mind grabs. We don't believe in a mindless faith, a mindless Christianity. It's a matter of having these truths break in upon us.

Why? Brethren, when you know something, when you're gripped by something, when you're gripped by the truth of something, you live in light of that. It matters. It impacts us.

Just listen right here in Ephesians. He says when we get over there in Ephesians 5, at one time you were darkness, now you're light in the Lord. There's the fact.

Walk as children of light. You see the flow. Here's what's true, therefore live in light of that reality.

That's who you are, so be what you are. And you know what the problem is? We forget what we are. That's just true.

Temptation comes. You know what? One of the reasons we forget who we are is because we are in a world where there is a devil and he slanders and he's full of error and we're among false religious systems that speak error. And so, all the time we are in a world that means to cloud the truth.

And all the time, it's telling us. The world tells us. And even our own flesh will tell us things that just aren't true.

Things come up. The devil is always right there to say, yea, hath God said? When the reality is He has said. So we need to be reminded over and over and over.

We need to be reminded over and over and over. Why? Trials come. We feel like, oh, God doesn't care.

God doesn't love us. And Scripture says, no, you should be rejoicing. This is just momentary light affliction.

If you really knew what the eternal weight of glory was, you see, we need to be brought back to that. We get in the affliction and it seems like this is an eternal great affliction. And Scripture says, oh, no, no, no, no, no.

It's not that. Why do we need to be told that it's not that? Because our perception is that our trial is huge. It's enormous.

And it's never going to stop. And yet, Scripture comes along and says, no, no, put it in proper perspective. It's not that enormous.

It's momentary. It's light. And it's just going to give way to this other thing.

You see, we need to be woken up to that. Sometimes we need to be awakened to the fact you're children of light. Therefore, walk as children of light.

You can start to be thinking, oh, wretched man that I am. I feel like I'm a constant failure. And Paul comes along and says, no, you better remember who you are.

You see, that kind of thing comes at us again and again in Scripture. Because what happens? Well, we feel the weight of the flesh. The Spirit is willing.

But the flesh is weak. And we feel the weakness of the flesh and therefore, we start to feel like constant failures. And Scripture comes along and says, oh, no, no, you're dead to sin.

Oh, I feel like I'm such a prisoner to the devil. No, no, no, He that is with you is greater than he that's in the world. You see, we're confronted by these truths all the time.

We get face-to-face with it and with the truth. And it impacts us. And we say, yeah, I can make it.

Yes, I can live righteous. Yes, I can walk. Why? We live in light of the realities of these truths.

Because you know what happens? When we see these truths and feel these truths, we look beyond these to the Christ Who has given us these truths and we recognize that behind these things is the reality of Christ Himself, of our Triune God Who is there to make these things a reality in our lives. Brethren, you know what we have before us? Look at it. Verse 19, you're no longer strangers and aliens, but you are... notice this, fellow citizens with the saints.

Notice this next. Members of the household of God. You see how he shifts there? Citizens.

That makes us think of a country. Members of a household. Now, James took that household term and he didn't actually take it all the way to children, but he can include the children.

And in our case, it certainly does. And you know the next thing he does? He goes from country, citizenship, family, and then he goes to a building, to a structure. I'm really looking forward to that one.

The structure. Basically, what you have is three distinct illustrations here. And I don't know, illustration, is that the right word to use? I'll let you figure that out.

It could be three pictures, figures, metaphors, analogies, whatever term you feel most comfortable with. It's clear that Paul sees the Christian as a citizen of a country, a member of a family, and pieces and parts of a structure that are being joined together. And we're talking about the very temple of God.

When you get to the end of Revelation and we're moving out into eternity, there's no more temple. Why? Because there is a temple, just not the kind we're used to. So, why three different illustrations? Let's ask that question.

Why three? Why not just one? Well, the reason's obvious. No single illustration captures all the realities, right? Jesus is called many things. If you just think, He's called the door.

He's called the Lamb, the Lamb of God. He's called the light, the light of the world. Now, you know, that almost seems contradictory.

Because a Lamb, a light, a door, those are really different things. To say that the same Person is every one of those things, at first glance, that sounds like an absolute contradiction. They're all very different.

How can one and the same Person be all three? Well, of course, it has to do with the truth that no one picture is enough. Each specific image captures and conveys something to us about Christ that the other images don't convey, right? I mean, it's true that being a citizen of a country conveys something to us that being a building doesn't. But being a dwelling place of God communicates something to us that being a member of a household doesn't exactly communicate.

That's why we get these different pictures. It's the same with the church. So, illustrations.

And these aren't the only three that Paul uses in this letter. You know, back at the end of chapter 1, he said that we are the body of Christ. When we go over to 5, you know that famous section about husbands love your wives? Well, the reality is that Christ and the church are shown to be in a relationship.

There, the church is the bride of Christ. The church is the bride of Christ. The church is the body of Christ.

The church is like a country. The church is like a family. The church is like a temple.

And these are the realities. We get all these different pictures that come at us. Now, the question that we must ask is this.

Now, I'm only going to deal with the first one today. Only the first one. Citizens.

Fellow citizens with the saints. That's what I want to look at. The other two, later on.

So the question that we want to ask is, what does this picture tell us about Christians? About what it means to be a Christian? Listen, you are fellow citizens with the saints. What does that mean? You might have some ideas. Okay, well, I know what that means.

Here's what I really want to know is what's the significance? I mean this, we have mothers. You're going to go try to raise your children tomorrow. You're going to try to homeschool tomorrow.

Some of you young ladies might go off to work. Some of you guys, girls and gals, you're going to go off to class tomorrow. Guys, you're going to go off to work.

We have people that have lives to live. And what I'm wondering is, to have God say, you're a citizen, a fellow citizen with the saints. How does that impact your life? How does that change tomorrow? How does that help you? What does it do? And you know what? We can basically conclude one of two things.

Either me knowing this will make absolutely no difference and Paul is simply wasting my time. Or, Paul tells us this with very calculated precision because it's a truth that if we lay hold of it, it's going to change the way we live. Well, I tend to prefer the second.

Because I believe that Paul is under inspiration and I don't believe God's wasting our time here. God intends for us, you know how He says, reckon yourselves dead to sin? Or consider, back there in Romans 6, consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God? There's many things like that. And I think this is one of them.

Consider yourselves citizens of another world as we live our life here. So that's what I want us to think about. Okay, look at the text.

V. 19, You're no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints. Now let's just take the word citizen. What does it mean? I'm a legal member of, let me just use this, a sovereign state.

Sometimes when we talk about citizenship, it could be a country, it could be a state, a sovereign state of some sort, it could be a kingdom, it could even be a city. Citizenship. A city-state maybe.

A nation. Now what does it mean? Some of you that are in this room are not citizens of the United States of America. Some of us are.

What's the difference? Well, the difference is this. There's legal realities. But here's basically what it comes down to.

That I have the right and the rights and the privilege and the responsibility upon me, myself, my person, that are attached to being a citizen of the United States of America. That's the idea here. It doesn't necessarily involve me being in this country.

I'm still a citizen of the United States of America even when I was recently traveling in Europe. And you see, the reality is that just because I was over there, I still enjoyed the rights. I still had a right to vote.

You know, Americans who are outside the country can vote during elections. Mailing. And you know what? Privilege.

I have the privilege no matter where I am in the world to be able to travel back here. Why? It's my country. I'm a citizen here.

But then the duties and responsibilities also come with it. Because if you know, I'm off in Africa, guess what? This government expects that I'm going to pay my taxes. Just because I'm over there doesn't mean, like, oh, April 15th's coming.

Let's run to Nepal and visit John. Because if I'm not here on April 15th, I don't have to pay my taxes. Nobody thinks that way.

Because we understand citizenship better than that. So, here's a question that I want to ask. Where is this citizenship? You know what's interesting about v. 19? Paul doesn't tell us where it is.

He just tells us who we are citizens with, but not where our citizenship is. He just says that we're citizens. But you know what? In the context here, I think there's something very interesting to look at.

Look back at v. 12. Notice this. Ephesian Gentiles.

Remember how it was when you did not know the Lord. Remember what it was like when you were lost? See, that's what he's saying to them in v. 12. Remember that you were at that time.

What time? The lost days. Okay, Paul, what were we? We were separated from Christ. No matter how religious, we were separated from Christ.

Alienated from the commonwealth. Oh, that word commonwealth is interesting. Because you know that that word can also be translated citizen.

Or citizenship. Basically the same word that we're dealing with. Down in v. 19.

Commonwealth. Citizenship. You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

So here's the thing. When Paul says in v. 19, you're no longer an alien. Who were we aliens towards? The commonwealth of Israel.

You're no longer an alien, but you're a fellow citizen. What citizenship does it seem like he has in mind? I mean, think with me. Think with me.

All that used to be true of me in v. 12 is no longer true, right? We were separated from Christ. The reality is, are we separated anymore? Or am I actually one with Christ? You see what the next verse says? It says I've been brought near. I'm no longer separated.

I'm brought near by the blood of Christ. That's what it says. When we were lost, we were strangers to the covenants of promise.

Let me ask you this. Are we still strangers to the covenants of promise? Just glance over at 3.6 of Ephesians. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs.

Members of the same body. And notice this. Partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

I know the term covenant doesn't show up there, but certainly the promises. The promise. The promise of all promises.

Really, what all those covenants are looking towards. What a relationship with God. We've been brought near.

The barriers are down. We had no hope, but what about now? Go to Ephesians 4.4. There's one body, one Spirit, just as you were called. What does it mean to be called? We've been called to hope.

To the one hope that belongs to our call. Let me ask you this. We were without God.

Are we still without God? Well, no. We saw this in the last couple weeks. We saw right there in chapter 2, verse 18.

What does it say? Through Christ, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Are we separated from the Father? Are we without the Father? No, we're not. We've been brought near.

We've been given access. The question I ask is this. Are all those other things undone and totally reversed by Jesus' blood, by Him tearing down the obstacles, and by Him reconciling us in one body through the cross to His Father? Is everything reversed except our alienation to the commonwealth of Israel? Or would we say, uh-uh.

Paul's telling us what we were, but it's not true anymore. We're not alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. Certainly that's what he's saying.

We're no longer an alien. We're fellow citizens. Fellow citizens with what? Well, basically Christ is undoing this reality that we were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and we're no longer alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.

And we're fellow citizens with the saints. Of what country? The commonwealth of Israel. Now listen to me.

It's obvious he's talking about the spiritual realities of the commonwealth of Israel. Why? Because it's with the saints. It's not with anybody.

Fellow citizenship with the saints. Not with unbelieving Jews. That's for certain.

But the reality is, brethren, listen to me. Don't fall for this nonsense that God has two different people. Israel over there and the church.

Because it's just not true. What we find here is this alienation from the commonwealth of Israel is gone. And it's not just that the church is now friendly towards Israel.

It's that we're no longer strangers and aliens to the commonwealth of Israel. We're fellow citizens, which means we're right in there the same as they are. We are citizens of the same Israel that all the rest of those who are Jewish saints are citizens of.

By saying that we're fellow citizens with the saints, Paul is very clearly spelling out exactly what Israel he has in mind. Look, you know he said this. Not all Israel is Israel.

He's not saying that now we have some part in physical national Israel over in the land of Canaan. That's not what he's saying. He's talking about the fact that we were outsiders.

Yes, even to the country, even to the physical entity, we were outsiders. But the big reality of being the outsiders is not being outside on a physical sense. It's being outside in the fact that we don't have a part with the people of God and Israel.

Israel. That's the God-wrestler. And we're brought in, we're made children of Abraham.

Have you ever read in Scripture, we are the true circumcision? James, you ever read that? Where did that come from? Philippians 3.3. We are the true circumcision. Who? Remember, those Philippians there, that

was a colony of Rome. We're talking Gentiles.

We're not talking Jews. Ah, there might have been some Jews there, just like there were in many places where there was money to be made. Typically they went.

But basically, you had a colony of Rome. They were Gentiles. And yet, Paul calls them the true circumcision.

Why? What makes you a true circumcision? Well, it has to do with your relationship with true worship, your relationship with the Spirit of God, your relationship with Jesus Christ. That's the reality. Brethren, we're fellow citizens.

Full rights. We're no longer outsiders. Full rights.

The saints. Let's think about the saints for a second. Now, James hit on that term in the first hour too.

The next question that we should ask is this. Who are the saints? You might say, well, that would mean any and every Christian, wouldn't it? Well, yes. In a general sense.

Say, what do you mean? Well, think with me about what Paul's doing here in this chapter. He's basically stressing that the Gentile has been brought into equality with the believing Jew. The believing Gentile.

See, we were once, who? The Gentiles. Separated. Alienated.

Without. No hope. We were the outsiders.

And we have been brought near by the blood of Christ. You have to get the feel for this. Yes, it's true that Jews have to come too.

But remember what's said in 17. The Jews all the time were considered near. They needed to be nearer.

That's true. Christ came and preached peace to those who were far off. That's us.

And to those who were near. You see, the Jews were already near in a sense. As far as the light that they had.

The mystery is this. That the Gentiles are fellow heirs. We just read that in chapter 3. Brethren, when it says, So then you are no longer.

You Gentiles are no longer strangers and aliens. But you are fellow citizens with the saints. Do you see who he has in mind when he uses saints there? Oh yes, we're saints too and we're added in.

But the reality is, is he's looking at us coming as these Gentile outsiders. And being made fellow citizens with the saints. The Jewish saints.

And think with me. We're talking about right at the beginning of the church era. You remember what he said back in chapter 1 verse 10? About Christ uniting the things on earth and the things in heaven.

Again, I think you have this picture. Of the Gentiles largely are the ones who were still alive. They were still on the earth.

They were being united with these saints who are in glory. And I think the picture he has here is largely the Old Testament saints. The Jewish saints.

That we are now fellow citizens with them. The reality, it's like Jesus Christ spoke about. You remember that Jesus looked and said, Many of the sons of the kingdom are going to be cast into outer darkness.

He said, but we're going to have multitudes that come from the east and the west and the north and the south. And you know what they're going to do? They're going to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets. You see, we've been made one with them.

We're on equal standing with them. We were the same. We're fellow citizens with those to whom the covenants.

Think about the covenants of promise. You see, that's one of the things in there. It used to be that we were strangers to the covenants of promise.

Well, who were the covenants of promise given to? You go through and you think about those promises given to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. There were promises given to Moses. There were promises given to David.

And the reality is, brethren, that now we belong to them. We're in with them. We have common citizenship, common interest, common allegiance.

We shall see them. You know that. You're going to meet Christian.

We're fellow citizens. We are going to meet Abraham. And we're going to meet Isaac.

Jesus says we're going to sit down with them and recline. And Jesus is going to gird Himself and serve us. And we're going to recline with them.

That needs to be a big table. But it's going to happen because Jesus said it's going to happen. Just think with me about these saints.

You see, you know what the author of Hebrews does? He shows these people, these Old Testament saints, men and women of faith. And you know what they were doing? They felt that citizenship of belonging to another place coursing through their veins. And they were looking.

Let's go there. Let's go there. Hebrews chapter 11.

I mean, just feel this. They felt themselves aliens and strangers here. No longer strangers and aliens to a heavenly citizenship.

To a heavenly Israel. To a new Jerusalem. But while they were here, they lived in tents.

And that's such a picture. They didn't settle down. And oh, they were desiring.

Just feel how this is brought out. Brethren, we're like them. Hebrews 11.8 By faith, Abraham obeyed.

When he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. But I want you to get this. No matter what was promised here as an inheritance.

This is one of the places where the dispensationalists go wrong. They want to focus way too much on the land promises here. Because even then, Abraham did not march into the land of Canaan and build a house.

And you know what the author of Hebrews tells us? It's because even in that promise, even that inheritance was not what his heart was set on. Read with me. I'll convince you of that.

Yes, he was to receive an inheritance. But his offspring were going to receive the land of Canaan. That's true.

And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise. And it was a land of promise.

And it was a place of inheritance. Unquestionably. Twelve tribes came there and they were each allotted an inheritance.

We know that. But you just follow this. It was in a foreign land.

Did you get that? He went to the land of promise. But it was still a foreign land. And if that's not convincing enough, just keep reading.

Living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. Ah, here we go. He was looking forward to the city that has foundations.

He was looking for something outside this world. His heart was set on it. Brethren, you just remember, he may already be there.

We're not there yet. We are in the same place he was while he was here. We're looking for something else.

You don't plant your roots. You live in tents. You know what? Even if you don't live in a canvas tent, the house you live in should be just the same.

It's a tent. We're just passing through. We're foreigners here.

Don't plant yourself too deep. Don't get hooked in here. Because you know what? When your citizenship isn't here, kind of like traveling over to Europe just recently, I didn't go into that bed and breakfast and start buying a bunch of things and starting to fill the place up and starting to decorate.

Because we're just passing through here. This is the picture, folks. A city that has foundations.

You know what that implies? Nothing here has foundations. Not permanent ones. It's got foundations, but all these foundations give way.

Because even if they build your house... You know what? My house got built on a solid foundation. I've gone through drought and rain cycles back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And you know what? My house has basically been built on a pile of rock.

And I saw it there because it's the old projects. And so they hauled in all this rock for base. And after 11, 12 years, you can barely see any cracks in the sheet rock.

Barely. But there are about two in my bedroom, about that long. You know what it tells me? That no matter how solid it is, that foundation's given way.

And you know what? In the course of time, the whole thing. Because there's fire coming. And this whole world's going to be burned up.

I don't care what kind of foundations are out here underneath this building. It's gone. It's only a matter of time.

We all know it. And even if Christ delays His coming for millennia, this building's not here 300 years from now. It's going to crumble.

It's going to disintegrate. Everything does. Over there in London, we saw there's a place called London Wall.

And you've got that old Roman wall. But you know what? It crumbles. You can go look at it and it's been repaired over and over and over again.

Why? Because the thing's crumbling. It gives way. The elements, the rain, the wind, bugs.

Nothing here has foundations, brethren. It's only short-lived. But there is a city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

And we can pass over Sarah here. Let's go to 13. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers.

Here it is. Strangers and exiles on the earth. Do you know what? If you're no longer a stranger and alien but fellow citizens with these guys, then you're a stranger and alien everywhere else except in this heavenly kingdom.

You're a stranger and alien everywhere here. That's exactly what we have. And you know what? They acknowledged it.

I would say, brethren, that's one thing. Acknowledge it. You're passing through.

Nothing permanent. It's only fleeting. Hand breath.

A vapor. A vapor. And it's gone.

Just a moment. Just a few more rolling suns at most is the way we sing it. And then it's over.

It's just gone. You want to hold on to things loosely here. Just move through.

Don't be thinking about laying down all manner of foundations. And notice this, 14. For people who speak thus.

Isn't it interesting? He backs off from these patriarchs and now he just generalizes. And you know what he's saying? People who speak like this, notice, they make it clear that they're seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had the opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country. You know what we've seen here? A city. A homeland.

A country. And he says they were looking for it. It says that they were seeking it.

It says they desired it. They desire a better country. That is a heavenly one.

Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. For He has prepared for them a city. Listen, we're going there.

Did you ever hear of Jesus? He said, don't fret guys. I know you're all going to fall away from me. You're going to run away from me.

Peter, when you're restored, you strengthen your brethren. But he said, you can't follow me right now. Why can't we follow you right now? I'll even die with you.

No, you won't. You won't die with me right now. But later you will follow after.

But you know what he said? He said, I go to prepare a place for you. And that's what he's gone to do. He's gone to prepare a place.

And if you think with me, think about the thief on the cross. This day you'll be with me in paradise. You know, if you knew it, just a year from now, you know, I'm going to pack up and I'm going to move to a paradise out on a South Pacific island.

It's mine. I get to live there forever. You know, you probably aren't investing a whole lot in where you live right here.

Why? It would be foolish. There's no reason to do it. Why? Very soon, I'm headed out there.

That's going to be my home forever. In fact, if anything, I'm putting everything in boxes so I can take it with me. You say, well, we can't do that with the heavenly kingdom.

Well, we can't. You've never read Jesus if you believe that. Jesus said you can store up treasure in heaven.

Jesus said you can take your stuff and send it ahead. But you see, if you really have this citizenship mentality, my citizenship is in heaven from which I'm waiting for the Savior. And when He comes, the Lord Jesus Christ, yes, I get a new body.

A glorified body. But He's taken us home. And I'll tell you this place, this place is paradise.

And you know what? You know what the beauty is? God created us. And God designed a paradise for us. And if there's anybody that knows what a paradise is, this day you'll be with me in paradise.

Do you recognize, brethren, you die driving on the way home. See, we're like this, right? Just white-fisted, clenching, holding on. Oh no! We would not want to die driving home.

Think about all the things we'd miss. Seriously? This day you'll be with me in paradise? No, I don't want that! No, not that! I like it here. I like it here.

I like it here with all these crumbling foundations. After all, I just got married. I have children.

I'd like to see them grow up. Brethren, I understand that. Obviously, the Lord understands the affections that we have.

But brethren, one of the things that our affections need to be set off against are these realities. Just this glorious reality that there is all this reality just behind the veil. It's there.

We're citizens of it. With these guys. It's just like me being in Europe.

You don't have to be there already, but you're still citizens. You have full rights. What does that include? How about protection? You know what? No matter where I travel in the world, I have some idea if I got into trouble, I'm going to go seek out the embassy.

I think my country at home is going to help me. You say, is it like that? The angels are ministering spirits. God Himself said, not a hair on your head is going to perish.

You think He's got His eye on you? You know what it says? Scripture speaks about us being the apple of His eye. You know what Jesus said? As much as they do it unto one of the least of these My children, they do it unto Me. You think He's got interest in this thing? He does.

We're fellow citizens. He's got His eyes on us. His eyes are going to and fro across this whole earth looking specifically for those who are citizens of this kingdom.

And you know what? It also says not only is His eye upon them, His ear is attended to them. You see, the resources of this country are at My disposal. Jesus basically right before He left said, there it is.

Use My name. You have My name. Ask.

And it will be given to you. And you seek and you will find and you knock and it will be opened. You ask anything in My name, I'll do it.

We basically have the resources of glory at our disposal. Oh brethren, the author of Hebrews is looking at those who lived and died in faith. Strangers and exiles here.

This is not their home. Not their country. Not their homeland.

Not their city. They did not settle in. They didn't just... It's so temporary.

So fleeting. The author argues, if Abraham had been seeking some city or country here, he had full opportunity to return to it. But he didn't.

Why not? Why not? Verse 16 says, he desired a better country. A heavenly one. And we should just dwell on that for a moment.

He sought a country this world cannot offer. There is this city that has foundations. And I'll tell you this, you being citizens there, your obligations are to your King.

Do you know you're free here? You say, what do you mean? What I mean is what Jesus meant. You remember a day, some people came and said, Peter, does your teacher there, your master, does he pay his taxes? And Peter said, yeah, he pays his taxes. I wonder how confident Peter was when he actually answered that.

But he just says, yes, he pays his taxes. Maybe he knew. Maybe he knew from observing Jesus that Jesus always paid his taxes.

Maybe he wasn't certain, but he was just wanting to say yes and put his master in the best light. But you know what? Jesus knew it happened. Peter comes home.

Peter, what happened? What did they say to you? Okay, so this whole matter of the taxes comes up. And you know what Jesus says? He says, you know, if you've got a king, who does the king collect taxes from? From his own children? Or from others? Peter says others. And you know what Jesus said? Therefore the sons are free.

Now I know He's not specifically saying the citizens of heaven are free. He kind of goes back to that family thing, but bear with me here because even though we're kind of mixing our metaphors a little bit, the reality is this. When it comes to paying taxes here, you know what Jesus said? You're free.

Nevertheless, not to offend them, go fishing. He went fishing. He got enough to pay for both of them.

What's being said there? I'll tell you what's being said. Brethren, we're free here to do nothing else than simply please the Lord. And if we recognize that the Lord is pleased if we pay our taxes, we pay our taxes.

You know why? Because He's pleased, not because the government's pleased. And when the government's pleased with something, but our Lord isn't pleased with it, guess what? We have the freedom to say, who are we going to obey? God or man. And we're free to obey God.

Did you know that? You are absolutely free to obey God in every single situation that you're confronted with in this world. There is not a single scenario where you're not free to do that. Where you're not free to practice righteousness.

And free to please the Lord. Because you know what? They can never take anything away from you. Not a hair on your head is going to perish.

You say, wait. We hear about martyrs and their hair was burned off their heads as their whole body was burned at the stake. What does that mean they won't perish? I think what you need to do is look at the word perish.

Perish has the idea of damnation. I think the idea is, you're safe. You're secure.

You can do what's right. You are free to do what's right. You know what they can't take from you? They cannot take your hope.

They cannot take your peace. They cannot take your faith. They cannot take your eternal life.

They can't take your sin being pardoned. They can't take the reality that you are a citizenship of this heavenly kingdom. They can take none of that away.

They cannot take your love for Christ away. They can't. It doesn't matter what situation they put you in.

Can they demolish your house? Yes. Could they put you on the rack? Could they put you at the stake? Yes. But they can't take away anything that matters.

Can they take away your life? Jesus said they would take away your life. Of course they can do that. Can they take away some of your comforts in this world? Certainly they can take away your comforts.

Can they take away some of your freedoms in this world? Freedom as far as this, as far as being able to walk up and down these streets as you feel free. Could they put you in a jail cell? Yes. But you know what? Jesus said, if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

He's made His people free. We walk through this world free. Brethren, our freedom isn't based on whether our government allows us to have guns or not.

Our freedom is not based on whether our government approves of abortion or not. That's not the issue. We are citizens of another kingdom.

We have a king. And brethren, one of the greatest privileges of all of it is that we have the king. He's ours.

And the reality is that unlike being a citizen of the United States of America, I don't have access to President Trump. And it doesn't matter what I do, it is not likely I would ever get a hearing with him. And yet, I am bid.

I am told that he is not going to leave me or forsake me, and I am bid to come to the throne. I have access to the innermost place. And you know what? Not only do I have access to the innermost place, have you ever read that Jesus actually said we're going to sit on His throne with Him? And you start thinking about that.

Well, what does that mean? You've got a multitude that nobody can number and we're going to sit on the throne? It says we're going to judge the world and we're going to judge angels? That's what it means to be a citizen. How are we all judges? How are we all enthroned? Well, I think the throne has to do with governing, with leadership. Who are we governing? I don't know.

Man was made to oversee the creation. There's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. I know there's angels.

And for a season, we've been made a little lower than the angels along with Jesus Himself. We're going to be exalted obviously to a place of high exaltation. What does it all look like? I don't know.

Are there going to be other worlds? Are there going to be other beings? I don't know. I don't know what all of it looks like. But to have Jesus Christ tell us that we're going to sit on His throne with Him and the whole thing is paradise and there's foundations here that never shake.

It's never passing away. It's like you come and it starts and that's it. It's forever.

It's for good. Now brethren, I want to leave you with this. You are citizens.

Fellow citizens with the saints. You are citizens of heaven. Citizens of the true Israel.

Citizens of this country. This homeland. Citizens of this city.

What does it mean? Well, I'll tell you this, while you're here, you represent your country. Just like we do when we travel to other parts of the world. You represent your king and your country.

And you know what happens? When you say, I'm a Christian, yes, my citizenship is in heaven. Do you know what happens? The world is going to judge your homeland and your king by you. Do you know what happens? They're going to judge Him by you.

Because you're an ambassador and you're a representative of this kingdom. And you know what? Jesus said that if we love one another, the world's going to know that we belong to Him. Do you know what that tells me? They're watching.

The world's watching. And have you ever noticed that? When you say you're a Christian, they watch you ever so closely. Many of us remember Bob Jennings' story when he talked about after he was converted, he met up with a buddy and the guy tried to get him to drink a beer, and he said no, and he said no, and he said no, and he said no, and finally he said yes, and he put it to his lips, and the man was like, there it is! I knew it! You see, they're watching.

They're watching for us to stumble. And we represent. Brethren, if you're not living a holy life, hear me, you're representing Christ.

You don't live a holy life. You're a traitor. You know what the world's going to do when they laugh at you and when they mock at you because you are not showing yourself to be worthy.

Don't we get that kind of language? Walk worthy of the Gospel of Christ. What does that mean? Walk worthy, brethren, of being one who identifies with the Gospel in this book and the Christ of this Gospel. And you go out in this world, and if you don't, and when they mock at you and they laugh at you, they're laughing at all of us and at your king.

It's all a mockery. I knew it. There's no reality in it.

See, you put that beer to your lips. I knew it! Now sometimes in their conscience, it's just words because they know. They know, yeah, Bob Jennings, I know he's different, but I just want to find something.

And they're looking and they're watching, and you know they are. Brethren, you have no right to live your life the way you want to live it. You're representatives.

You're representatives in the midst of a world who is watching, and their eyeballs are upon you. You can't say it doesn't matter to anybody else what I do. Look, if you fall, it's kind of like representing this church.

You go out and you live a certain way in front of your family, and you know what they say? They don't just say something about you. In fact, very often, they look over your shoulder and it's that church. That pastor.

That's how they talk. It should be pastors plural, I recognize, but you know how they talk. And ultimately, it's their king.

I knew it. It's all a sham. Brethren, it's not a sham.

And to be a citizen of this country, if you're children of light, walk as children of light. If you're citizens of the heavenly kingdom, then walk worthy of such a kingdom. If you've identified with Christ, then brethren, let His image shine forth.

Because I'll tell you this, when the world laughs at you, they laugh at all of us. And they mock all of us. Above all, Christ gets ridiculed.

You hear Peter's words. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.

Brethren, there's imperatives. If you're fellow citizens, it should mark your life. If you're a fellow citizen with the saints, then there should be something saintly about your life.

If you're fellow citizens of the saints of this heavenly Jerusalem, this city that has foundations, this paradise of God. Think. They're all there.

They're all there. The saints. You remember what it says there in Hebrews 12? You've got the spirits of these just men and they've been made perfect.

They're there. No sin. No more sin.

And you know how it says, kind of like in 1 John 3, that those who have this hope, this hope that when we see Christ, we're going to be made like Him. Those who have hope, they seek to purify themselves here. Brethren, is your hope to dwell among perfect men and women in the very face of a perfect Christ? Well, if that's your hope, then you would be seeking to purify yourself here and to be a representative of this.

We are citizens. You are free men and free women. Walk in your freedom.

You are free to do righteously. We're free. They call this country the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Don't believe that. America's not free. Not at all.

Jesus said if you serve sin, you're a slave to sin. We live in the midst of a country that is serving sin. They are slaves.

We are the only free people. And it doesn't matter if we're in the United States of America or in North Korea. Christians are free men.

Oh, they may take our head off. They may torture us, but we're still free. Because there's all manner of things they can't take from us.

They have no power. And you just remember this. There in Daniel, it talks about a king.

And all these other kingdoms are going to give place. And the kingdoms of this world are going to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. He's coming with the sword, brethren.

And it's all going to be over. And every knee is going to bow. But it's not yet.

But right now, you are nevertheless a citizen. Brethren, when you walk out, walk worthy of your citizenship. Walk worthy of your king.

The world's watching. Father, we pray for grace to do this and live this. We ask for it in the name of He that is King of kings.

Amen. You're dismissed.

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