

CITIZENS OF A NEW KINGDOM

Most people in this country never have a chance to go to other countries and really experience what is different about living as a citizen of some other nation. Those who live in southern Texas, Arizona, or New Mexico can better appreciate the differences in being a citizen of the U.S.A. versus being a citizen of Mexico, for example. Those people who live in Europe see even more variety in that the countries are smaller and crossing from one to another is not uncommon. Most people there have passports that identify them as citizen of a particular country. Those who lived near Communist countries could really appreciate the differences that exist for citizens of different nations. If we were to compare our country to Middle Eastern countries, we could see gross differences. The same is true for Africa, India, China, and Southeast Asia. We can find a citizenship comparison that shows even more contrast than these just mentioned and that is the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of darkness. Just as we, as citizens of the U.S.A., have rights and responsibilities that are vastly different from those living in Africa, we, as citizen of the Kingdom of God, have rights and responsibilities vastly different from those living in the Kingdom of darkness. The New Testament frequently refers to the Kingdom of God. We can find information on the rights and responsibilities of the citizens of this Kingdom in several of Paul's letters.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. (Col 1:1-2, NIV)

Paul wrote this letter about the same time that he wrote the letter to Philemon. In the letter to Philemon, Paul did not call himself an apostle of Jesus Christ because he wanted to make his appeal to Philemon on a personal basis. Here, in this letter to the church at Colosse, Paul is speaking from a more authoritative position and does call himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, humility is evident though Paul is speaking from a position of authority. This is not a self assumed authority but is a position conferred on him by God, Himself. Just as in the letter to Philemon, we see that Timothy is there with Paul.

Early in this letter we begin to see things that relate to the Christians at Colosse being citizen of the Kingdom of God. In the King James Version these citizens are known by a special name -- saints. Most Christians today feel uncomfortable with being called "saints" because they really don't know that it simply means that we, as Christians, have been designated as being special and separate from the rest of the world. (This same word is translated "holy" in the NIV.) We are separated so that we can be useful to God Who is the King of this Kingdom. We also see a responsibility of Kingdom citizenship showing up early in this letter. Paul calls them "faithful brethren." Here faithfulness implies loyalty to the King which we show by being obedient to His commands and wishes. There are rewards also that come from such citizenship: Grace and peace are mentioned here. It is by God's grace that we are privileged to be citizens of His Kingdom where we abide in the internal and external peace that comes from relationship with the King of kings and Lord of lords.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints -- the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel (Col 1:3-5, NIV)

If you look closely, you can see additional rights, responsibilities and rewards that are part of citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Paul told these people that he was praying for them. We have the right to expect other Christian (other citizens of the Kingdom) to pray for us and support us in our Christian walk. At the same time, we have a responsibility to pray for others. In a similar way, we have a right to expect love from fellow Christians and a responsibility to show love to them in outward actions. We find responsibility in that we should have a good reputation of our faith among

those that know us or have heard about us. We find reward awaiting those that are Kingdom citizens in that we have Heaven as a final destination where we will be close to the Lord in a way that we can't even imagine at this time. This truth is the basis for our hope and positive outlook that we should have and project to others--again our right and responsibility.

that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. (Col 1:6-8, NIV)

Paul is writing to this church that God expects His people to be productive and to bear fruit as the truth of the gospel impacts their lives. What Paul says here is that the gospel is bearing fruit and for that to happen someone must help in getting the message out to others. Each of us has a calling to share our faith with others.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, (Col 1:9-10, NIV)

Wisdom and understanding are at the same time a privilege and a responsibility for citizens of the Kingdom of God. God has promised to provide such for us; however, we still can choose to do things against good judgment. We still must make the right choice. It is apparent that wisdom and understanding do not just happen automatically. We need to seek the Lord for such things and make them the object of prayer for ourselves and for others.

being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully (Col 1:11, NIV)

As citizen of the Kingdom of God we will find ourselves in struggles and confrontations and temptations. We need strength beyond ourselves in such times and realize that God will be our supplier of strength. We must not be willing to give in to temptations, or run from confrontations or give up in struggles. God provides the strength so that we can have the enduring character that is important in accomplishing anything.

giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. (Col 1:12, NIV)

So often we don't give much thought to what has happened our lives as a result of accepting God's salvation through Jesus Christ. For that reason, we are not as thankful as we should be. We were under the rule of the Kingdom of darkness and now we have been given new citizenship in the Kingdom of light. Paul tells us that this was a rescue operation and we seem to have lost a sense of the seriousness of being lost. The central figure in this Kingdom is Jesus. He is One to whom we owe a debt of gratitude and He is the One to whom we look for our hope for the future. Because it is in Christ that we find the means of the rescue -- He redeemed us and because He paid our penalty for sin, then we can experience forgiveness of sin.

A word of caution: We live in a good nation and you know we can live here and fail to experience the benefits of the freedoms and other blessings that are ours. It is possible to be in the Kingdom of God and miss out on the benefits that are there because we fail to get involved and to find out what is ours in God's storehouse of promises that are available to His citizens.