

A Heavenly Citizenship:

Living In A Strange Land

*...our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly
await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus
Christ, - Philippians 3:20*

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Title Page

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*All these people were still living by faith ... admitting
that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. -*

Hebrews 11:13

There's an unseen world that's impervious,
To the sadness of our day,
A world unknown and mysterious—
But the veil always lifts when we pray
It is mostly a place that beforehand
We imagine in the words of a song
Of a promised though never explored land,
Where we know in our souls we belong.

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Dedication

Dedicated to all those whose passion for the Word of God
takes them into new inspiring discoveries of God's Love.

Introduction

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." - John 18:36

I have observed in recent years some social changes that represent a marked rethinking of the cultural norms that, for me, defined the world I was comfortable living in. I had been an unquestioning and patriotic supporter of what life meant in the country of my domicile. As I grew, the flag represented everything I called home; we opened each school day saying the pledge of allegiance to it. This was my country! But times have changed. I am no longer at home in the world I find myself in ... and the changes I observe may effect my faith more than my patriotism.

I thought I knew the definition of words, for one. I spoke the language common to all my family and friends. But now new expressions and new words have invaded the vernacular challenging my ability to comprehend what is being discussed. What is a 'woke'¹ or the pronoun 'ze'?² Transgender and cisgender are troubling distinctions for me—for starters. It is fast

1. woke?? What does this word mean? I am not able to put this term in a sentence.

2. The pronoun 'ze' for example. "a person who goes by neopronouns could actually be a man, a woman, both, neither, or something else entirely." - <https://www.mypronouns.org/neopronouns>

becoming a whole new world, I, personally, am feeling less a part of. I can relate to the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 *“admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”*³

Marriage used to be culturally understood between a man and a woman. Nothing seemed more sacrosanct. It is 1 of 7 sacraments in the Catholic faith. Until recent times, the discussion of ending the life of a full-term baby [fetus] was never a cause for public debate. Life was always sacred! We call fetuses, infants. But how does God see it?⁴ There is no biblical term for a fetus. A symposium on this biblical subject would offer nothing definitive or conclusive but the newness of this discussion is undeniably disturbing.

Politically correct use of pronouns—by a generation that probably doesn’t even know what a “pronoun” is—is dangerously confusing: laws are being passed to levy economically crippling fines on offenders.⁵ The gender of some children is being questioned.⁶ Young children diagnosed with gender disforia?

As believers who still trust God’s Word for direction, we owe it to our faith to give serious study to all these matters.

3. Hebrews 11:13

4. Exodus 21:22-23 If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury [to her alone or she miscarries?] , you are to take life for life,

5. ‘Property owners in New York City will be fined \$250,000 for using “improper pronouns” due to new transgender laws.’ - <https://www.hrc.org/reso-urces/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics>

6. “The general rule for determining whether a child is transgender (rather than gender nonconforming or gender variant) is if the child is consistent, insistent, and persistent about their transgender identity. ... if you think your child might be transgender ... consult a gender therapist.” - <https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics>

The Church

And one must wonder how the church will fare in this new world. We, as peace loving people, have accepted over the years the small and less uncomfortable changes we were asked to welcome; in the exchange we were willing to compromise a few practices with which we were comfortable. We accepted change in the church to make it more appealing to the demographic we wanted in attendance.

Flip-flops on a Sunday morning became more common than ties and suits. But such change is an innocent correction to allow people to feel more "at home" in a church service. We exchanged an organ for a few guitars. This only impacts some of the ritual. Yet, when would the tweaks to our worship impact our faith, what we believe about sin and holiness?

We didn't complain, too loudly, when the church began to morph into something more pleasing to the culture it was in. The T.V. became more a respectable modicum of relaxation instead of the "devil's box." It is reasonable to assume that inevitably even church goers would be watching movies in which the Lord's sacred name would be dragged through the cultural mud and nudity would become common place on the big screen. The point here is that even church goers are being tempted through a subtle cultural adaptation and the newest customs to accept this "social evolution" as just a normal part of life. Now we must beg the question: when will too much be too much?

When will social evolution cross a boundary God's people dare not cross!? The church has always been willing to acquiesce to, what we might politely call, *cultural adjustments*; so, for example, when preachers could no longer hold the line on divorce and remarriage, even they engaged in this change without shame. There might be a few pockets of sub-cultural hold-outs who in puritanical fashion maintain an allegiance to "old school" ways, but for the most part, churches have "modernized."

But the ride we are on is dangerously fast and we don't know where we are heading. If we don't get off soon, the church—to follow the metaphor— could crash and burn!⁷ We would cease to be an instrument and a witness of God's grace to the world. God warned us in seven letters all reprinted and archived in the opening chapters of His revelation to the apostle John.⁸

A Detour

Should the church worry if it doesn't bend to the cultural worldview? Is it possible that even in democratic countries, the preacher might be fined or imprisoned for defining a theology—a faith—that is exclusive, that verbalizes their disapproval of some of the changes taking place in the world? Is it possible the premier law enforcement agencies might have to enforce laws directly opposed to church teaching? Even in America!?

I must take this detour but we will be back on course shortly: America might be the last bastion of our freedom to define our faith, preach our faith publicly, and live out our faith without the threat of litigation.

Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. - John Adams

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" reads the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution but how secure is this right and can it be interpreted in a way that erodes some of that "free exercise"?"⁹

7. Revelation 3:2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.

8. Revelation 2-3

9. "If ever a time should come, when vain and aspiring men shall possess the highest seats in Government, our country will stand in need of its experienced patriots to prevent its ruin." — Samuel Adams

The American “Bill of Rights” which is, itself, a unique document, is being revisited as potentially a “living” document but outdated, shortsighted, and simply unable to address global considerations, modern technological advances, and social change. Many want to pattern our constitution after that of a more global modal. [Should America be more European? Or Scandinavian?] The move is afoot to interpret a more activist view of the U.S. Constitution.

The younger generation wants to redefine a democracy in terms of social entitlements instead of the moral duty we have enjoyed for, literally, a couple centuries. And here’s the point: the result is a further separation between the world’s ideals and the biblical directives that determined social conduct. Society is changing in ways that some of us could never imagine and maybe soon the christian church will come to that uncrossable chasm.

Some say we are heading toward an Orwellian future, a dystopia. History is not being written; it is being *rewritten* to support a new social order—a social order that finds Christianity in the way.

The Good Fight

How do we deal with such change if we are unwilling to accept it or be part of it (and hopefully we are unwilling!)? Should we push back in a public way, marching, finding ways to voice our opposition? We might; but that is not the biblical idea.

When Paul fought the good fight¹⁰ he was not taking up arms against the Roman government—a government that was, in fact, trying to erase christianity. He didn’t march on Rome (to my knowledge). In fact, he was careful to pray for them—and probably led not a few soldiers to Christ as he went.

10. 2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made ...for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.¹¹

The direction of Paul's thoughts seemed to gravitate rather toward an acceptance of circumstances,¹² not seeking to comply with what for conscience' sake he could not comply with, but in a simple recognition of the truth that *this is not our world*. Our citizenship is elsewhere. We are looking in from the outside.

Another Kingdom

At times, I was a Peter, ready to chop off an ear or two,¹³ to fight for the cause of "the way things were." (That's why they call me a "conservative," I guess.) But this approach needs to be rethought.

Jesus said it best, "*My kingdom is not of this world. Else we would fight!*"¹⁴

It is of *this* kingdom, of *His* kingdom, we, who follow Christ, are citizens. This is a simple truth but profound in its application, sharing how we can live through social change and still maintain a vibrant witness for Him. We must recognize the conflict as one against the Christ in us.¹⁵ We must understand

11. 1 Timothy 2:1-2

12. Philippians 4:12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

13. John 18:10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

14. John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

15. John 17:14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

that the difficulty we experience in some social change is because it is not an experience we share or identify with in the Kingdom of God, where we come from. We must recognize that our hearts are not in this age. We are defined by the Kingdom of God. We are His people¹⁶ and herein lies our happiness.¹⁷

Heaven Into Us

We, who are believers, must discover the change within. "The kingdom of God is *within*."

*nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.*¹⁸

We are often troubled because we are ready to fight, ready to argue causes that have more value to others than to us. We are debating matters that are never debated within us because these are issues that have no relevance in the kingdom of God.

We need to be especially aware of the change in us as the Spirit of God transforms us and conforms us into the image of God's Son.¹⁹ We are slowly morphing, ourselves, into the people of God who are only at home with Him in *His* kingdom. ..as it should be!

16. 2 Corinthians 6:16 For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

17. Matthew 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

18. Luke 17:21

19. Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

I am reminded of a statement by a preacher from years gone by; Dr. Lenny Evans of Niles, Ohio used to say, *“Jesus did not die—so much—to get us to heaven as to get heaven into us.”*

Here is where we begin. This is the burden of this brief work.

The Kingdom Within

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' -
Matthew 10:7

Jesus wasn't the first to speak of the Kingdom of God.²⁰ Prophecies anticipated it's coming and the downfall of all other kingdoms.²¹ Jesus' message to His generation was that the kingdom was soon to be established, not locally or in any region²² but in the hearts of those who would follow Him. God's kingdom is not a region, a place, but the *reign* of God. He is *Lord*, as well as Savior, to His followers.

If we compare earthly kingdoms with God's kingdom, we are quickly struck with the mutual exclusion between the two. As believers, our minds are being transformed,²³ our

20. Psalm 44:4 You are my King and my God

21. Daniel 2:44 In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

22. John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. ... But now my kingdom is from another place."

23. Romans 12:2 be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

natures created anew,²⁴ and our hearts filled with a new awareness of God,²⁵

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."²⁶

Scholarship affirms, "[God's Kingdom] is opposed to everything present and earthly, to everything here and now."²⁷ God's Kingdom is the realm where His holiness rules supreme. Sin cannot enter there. The Savior came to do away with sin.²⁸ The only qualification to become a citizen of God, therefore, is *repentance*.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."²⁹

Citizenship in God's kingdom is not based on qualifications but on our acceptance of Christ's work on Calvary on our behalf—through faith. Righteousness, which is a primary characteristic of God's Kingdom,³⁰ cannot be legislated into existence. There is

24. Romans 6:4, 11 we too may live a new life. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

25. Romans 2:29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

26. Romans 8:15

27. Kittell, vol I, p. 584

28. Hebrews 9:26 ... Christ ...he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

29. Matthew 4:17.

30. Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

no set laws or code standard by which we can claim ourselves qualified for heaven.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,³¹

Nothing could be more obvious and valued for a person of faith than this message of saving grace, but it bears repeating here to underline the importance of recognizing that salvation is not something separate from citizenship in the Kingdom of God. When we sin, we dishonor the place of our spiritual birth. When we sin we raise the flag of another world.

“The parables of the kingdom are spoken to drive home this point,”³² Karl Schmidt reminds us.³³ Citizenship in God’s kingdom requires only a faith³⁴ that is open to allowing God to rule in our lives.³⁵

31. Romans 14:17

32. Mark 4:11 He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables

33. Kittell, vol I, p. 585

34. “The Greek view ...sees in man a self-evolving character in which the bodily and sensual element withers and the spiritual grows. ...This ideal is alien to Jesus and His apostles.....no training of the sou, no mysticism, no ecstaticism can give access to Him.” Kittell, vol . p. 586

35. 2 Peter 1:1-11 To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ... His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ...For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A Theocracy

The Kingdom of God, Professor Lohfink calls, “*God’s new society.*”³⁶ When Jesus instructed His disciples to pray “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **your kingdom come**, your will be done, **on earth** as it is in heaven*”³⁷ He was not thinking of a world beyond but as Dr. Lohfink observed, “[the] *here and now* ... *The reign of God has a social shape. ... [But] Its proper place is the [life of the] church.*”³⁸

We, the church, the citizens of God’s kingdom, should, therefore, be measuring our personal conduct against a biblical standard—not outwardly as an organized or well defined social order but—inwardly as a people who individually seek a personal relationship with a holy God. God’s rule in our lives is a theocracy not a democracy nor any form of man’s rule over man.³⁹ The good professor warns us, “*Your kingdom come*” therefore implies a radical exchange of rulers. In that way also, the *Our Father* is a dangerous prayer.”⁴⁰

This is not an incidental point in God’s mind. Jesus scolded the crowd, “*Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*”⁴¹

It isn’t a matter of making points with God, by living a good life or by presupposing God would prefer this or that from us. It isn’t a guessing game with God. Obedience to God’s Word is not as mysterious as we sometimes suppose. It is a simple message of love, gentleness, and caring—the Fruit of the Spirit.

36. Lohfink. p. 53. Perhaps, the term ‘society’ is a poor word to describe the theocratic rule of God within His church.

37. Matthew 6:9-10

38. Lohfink. p. 55

39. Revelation 11:15 The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.

40. *ibid.* p. 57

41. Luke 6:46

It is a message of God serving others through us. Peter takes us step by step⁴² alerting us to the need for diligence to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and then love for our fellow believers. This is a natural progression and a practical application of faith. Then he adds, *“if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*⁴³

A judgment is planned⁴⁴ when some will be shocked into a painful reality: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven...”*⁴⁵

And Jesus made plain His thoughts: *“but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

This all sounds brutally honest, and admittedly a bit vague, on the Savior’s part but His yoke is easy; His burden is light.⁴⁶ We are only being encouraged to live the new us—in a word: Love.⁴⁷

God's People

The Kingdom of God is His reign in the hearts and lives of His people.⁴⁸ So it is not just an “eschatological” hope, or a promise

42. 2 Peter 1:1-7

43. 2 Peter 1:10-11

44. Matthew 7:22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?'

45. Matthew 7:21

46. Matthew 11:30

47. John 15:17 This is my command: Love each other.

48. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 ...encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

of His coming Kingdom. Peter exhorted, “*Be holy in all you do,*” for He is Holy!⁴⁹

God has since the Exodus⁵⁰ sought a people who would abandon practices, passions, and thoughts that did not represent His great heart and separate themselves out as a people “called-out.”⁵¹

A most inspired portion of Scripture is Samuel’s diatribe upon learning that God’s people wanted a king to “... *be like all the other nations*”⁵² We should not fail to perceive the doleful nuance in the prophet’s words when Saul becomes Israel’s first “human” king *in the place of God*. Samuel lamented, “*Has not the LORD anointed you [Saul] ruler over his, [God’s] inheritance?*”⁵³ ... over God’s own people who now preferred the kingdom model of all the nations around them! God has been replaced in the hearts of the Israelites. Then Samuel excoriated Israel for discarding the Lord’s care when He, through His prophets, has been nothing but good to them.⁵⁴

*Samuel said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” “He is witness,” they said. Then Samuel said to the people, “It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt. Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the LORD as to all the righteous acts performed by the LORD for you and your ancestors.”*⁵⁵

49. 1 Peter 1:15

50. Leviticus 11:45 I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

51. The Greek word for ‘church’ means ‘called-out.’

52. 1 Samuel 8:20

53. 1 Samuel 10:1

54. 1 Samuel 12:3 Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes?

55. 1 Samuel 12:5-7

And Samuel proceeded to remind Israel of the leadership of the God who they now wanted set aside so that they could be like the other nations about them. Other countries had kings; they wanted one. Very few scriptures are as sad an account as this one. They didn't want God to reign over them, even though, He had been repeatedly longing for this privilege from the beginning!⁵⁶

We need to review—not just the narrative of Saul's coronation—but the heartache of God, who in a very real sense had been rejected as their ruler by His own people. We need to revisit this account when the society we are in wants us to pattern our behavior, our principles, our value system after them and not God's holiness! Saul's rise to the monarchy is not the beginning of the Kingdom of Israel as much as it marks the end of a theocracy under God's headship. And we whose citizenship is now in God's Kingdom need to value the lesson here. Salvation is all about God's opportunity to reign in our lives, here and now. We are His inheritance.⁵⁷

56. Hosea 11:1,4 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ... led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.

57. Psalm 33:12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.

God's kingdom, again, speaks to His reign, not only in His future Kingdom which God will set up,⁵⁸ but also and primarily NOW within and among His people.

The Believer's Heart

There is no doubt much to be desired in the way even God's people honor their citizenship especially if they—we—are influenced, drawn into discussions and activities that are not God's will for us. We have been stirred at times to take up verbal arms against others, justifying our actions as a worthy cause. We have been on crusades on social media and even around the dinner table to push back against family and friend, whom we love but, who do not "support the good cause" for which we have signed up. And things get heated, relationships splintered, and hurt feelings linger.

And all the while we are thinking that there is something wrong here. I am reminded in the scripture when Moses struck a rock God instructed him to "speak to" to provide water for Israel to drink.⁵⁹ God's displeasure was evident in His reaction, "*you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the*

58. Luke 12:32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Mark 9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

59. Numbers 20:8 Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.

sight of the Israelites..."⁶⁰ We all probably have had such moments when God was not "honored" by what we said or did and others looked on thinking that there is nothing christian to see here; let's move on.

We are citizens of God's kingdom at times waving the flag of another country! Yet within each believer there is a sense of conviction that something is wrong with this picture. There is an inner peace that is disturbed like the garrison on the wall sounding the alarm.⁶¹

David's 51st Psalm is worth reading again as a personal cry of the heart to tell God how sorry we are in forgetting where we came from and where home is under His care. The natural cry of the believer's heart is always for mercy.⁶² If anything defines us, as people of faith, as citizens of Heaven, it is a humble recognition of our need of God and a spirit of meekness that unflinchingly debates within us the need for us to faithfully follow Him.⁶³

The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, as believers, is in a real sense, a new beginning, an introduction, into what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. As citizens of Heaven, the Spirit of God is already at work within us preparing our hearts and minds.⁶⁴ The fruit of the Spirit are clearly in evidence of this truth:

60. Numbers 20:12

61. Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

62. 2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret,

63. Colossians 3:12 [KJV] Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

64. John 16:8-11 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*⁶⁵

Citizenship in God's kingdom, therefore, is more than a status. We need to be impressed with the change God is creating in us. We are not who we used to be before salvation came to 'our house.'

We may need to be reminded from time to time that there are changes occurring within us producing in us a greater appreciation for the Kingdom of God, an increasing desire to share in that kingdom⁶⁶ and a greater excitement knowing we are no longer "of this world."⁶⁷

With God and the fellowship of the saints of God, we are indeed at home. What once was strange to us before God engendered faith in our hearts is now who we are becoming in Christ. Paul reminds us, "you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household."⁶⁸

65. Galatians 5:22-25

66. Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

67. John 17:16

68. Ephesians 2:19

The Guarantee

Paul called this the “seal”⁶⁹ of the Spirit. God has “*set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit,⁷⁰ guaranteeing what is to come.*”⁷¹ Our salvation and the work of the Spirit are the *guarantee, the pledge*. The Holy Spirit’s ministry to us⁷² is the “*guarantee of what is to come*” of a limitless resource of divine grace God will bestow up us when Jesus returns.⁷³ The riches of Heaven, of God’s glory, were bequeathed to us through Christ’s death.⁷⁴ His resurrection⁷⁵ guarantees all the promises.⁷⁶ Peter defines these as “*very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*”⁷⁷

It is important that we recognize that even while in this life, our citizenship is there, “*with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*”⁷⁸

69. Dictionary: to confirm, authenticate, place beyond doubt

70. given as a pledge ...that the full amount will subsequently be given.

71. 2 Corinthians 1:22

72. John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

73. Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

74. Hebrews 11:1 [King John translation] Faith is the title deed of all the promises of God we anticipate coming.

75. Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

76. Romans 6:4 ...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

77. 2 Peter 1:4

78. Ephesians 2:6

*...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but **fellow citizens with God's people** and also members of his household...*⁷⁹

But, admittedly, here we are, at times, meditating vengeance, obsessed with bitter memories, rehearsing the woeful cry of some painful experience, or reliving past regrets rationalizing who's to blame for what—all of which God has forgiven, which carries no weight of judgment with Him because of Calvary. Whatever should we do!

A Rung Tree

A college professor shared a story from his past that may encourage us as we endeavor to follow Christ. Hobart was a young lad who observed his dad “ring” a tree in the back yard. Ringing a tree, went the explanation, is cutting into the bark deep enough into the cambium layer to prevent the sap in the tree from flowing into the root system when Autumn comes. Hobart saw his dad ring the tree and he expected the leaves to wither and drop off but the summer went into Fall and the leaves were still there. Hobart thought to correct his dad, an excited boy about to prove himself right and dad wrong, “The tree was still alive, dad.”

“Hob, the tree is dead, son.” His dad spoke without hesitation. He had no interest in revisiting the tree.

Winter turned to Spring and small new leaves broke out on every branch of that tree, giving Hobart renewed confidence that the tree was not dead. He alerted his dad, who again reiterated in fatherly tones the lesson of the rung tree.

“Hob, the tree is dead, son.”

79. Ephesians 2:12, 18-19

Dad didn't need to look. The leaves turned brown and fell off. The tree was indeed ...dead.

Hobart Grazier was my professor who shared that story of his life to explain that even if we sin from time to time, the old nature, like the old tree, has been disconnected from any source of strength that would feed its ways. As we follow Christ and serve Him in relationship expect old habits, old ways, old thoughts, old feelings to drop off, that are not representative of the holiness of God and His kingdom.

The Kingdom Without

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. - Hebrews 11:6

There is a world of hurt that encircles the believer and this is not unexpected. Jesus encouraged us to recognize that persecution and ridicule are common from a society that ridicules our message of the Cross and has no understanding of the source of our peace and joy. This is the sermon on the mount rewritten in the history of every citizen of the Kingdom of God. Happiness to us does not hinge on amusement or thrills but on allowing God full reign in our lives.⁸⁰ The Fruit of the Spirit in our lives is a radical change from the priorities and passions that once defined us.

We can anticipate the opposition of a world that does not speak our language or understand the words we speak in our world of worship to the God who reigns within. Jesus gave us this heads up: *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*⁸¹ The import of their efforts is clear: The world will insult us, throwing in our teeth all the promises of Scripture yet to be vindicated. They will be relentless in their pursuit to discredit our message.

80. see my booklet on “The Beatitudes” the story of a believer’s happiness.

81. Matthew 5:11

They will speak all manner of evil to hurt us and discredit the work of God.

*It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!*⁸²

And there are reasons this is expected. A few immediately come to mind:

Political Divisions

Society is changing but, in terms of God's reign, not for the better. In a word: politics.

The evolution of social change is always political. When John recalled Jesus' reaction to His own popularity as a healer and deliverer, he wrote, "*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*"⁸³ This fragment of the Savior's personal history appears an incidental footnote on His life. But we would be wrong to say so. We may have mistakenly focused on His miracles instead of the Cross.

Here is where two roads met before Him: political fame or why He came. But Jesus wasn't political. He championed instead the value of a quiet and isolated mountain side where He could disappear and pray. We may fail to appreciate the significance of this moment in the Savior's challenging life. Jesus' brothers were caught up in the exciting possibility that their elder brother might be a messianic leader to overthrow Rome and give Israel its political freedom. "*No one who wants to become a public figure ,* " they argued, "*acts in secret. Since you are*

82. Matthew 10:25

83. John 6:15

doing these things [these miraculous things], *show yourself to the world.*"⁸⁴

Jesus was not opting for a private life, else He would never have spend His adult life combing Palestine, preaching, teaching, and healing folks. But—and here is the secret to this unprecedented move—the Kingdom of Heaven, His Kingdom, is *NOT* political! Heaven is a theocracy in which the citizenry, that's us, enjoys a close relationship and a friendship with the King of kings. We do not revolt; we do not take political sides. There are no political movements, no political sides to take! There are no elections in God's Kingdom. Political debates designed to gather votes, or followers, is not a trademark of God's world!⁸⁵

This is a marked difference between the world about us and the world within us. True christianity embraces fellowship and unity of purpose because God reigns there. Man is in charge in his world where a cacophony of political voices echo across the land. At best, man achieves a democratic dictatorship of 51%. At worse the masses are enslaved by whoever rules.

Materialism

Our faith affirms that God not only exists but He answers prayer as a continuous and creative flow of His grace. But society selling out academically to evolutionary theory argues that there is a natural social change by which man is approaching utopia or a better world. It is, according to the evolutionists, not divine grace, but a survival of the 'fittest' in terms of social improvement. It is a message of self-reliance and humanism, Along with this view there has developed within intellectual circles a materialistic view of science. Science, it is believed, will eventually solve all the mysteries of the universe. There is no God in this picture because, by their reasoning, He is part of a mythological past and not the physical universe.

84. John 7:4

85. Acts 15:28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...

From this distinction between the believer's worldview and the world's there exists all subsequent disagreement. It is on this worldview, an evolutionary and materialistic scientific approach that scripture is seen as ancient folk legend and miracles are discredited.

There is no compromise possible here, for we, who are citizens of the coming Kingdom of God—we who are in preparation by the work of the Spirit to enter God's world—want God's reign in our lives. To us: science is a gift of God, in a natural world that shows consistency and form, to provide us with a better life. The gift of science was never intended to replace the Creator who made a systematic structure out of the chaos of the beginning of the universe so man could study the marvel of His creation.

Racism & Prejudice

There is a word used more often than any other to describe us—but it is an inaccurate perception of who we are. We have been called *racist*. We are viewed as prejudiced against any other belief system that does not endorse Jesus as the only way to God. We are accused of marginalizing those who do not follow our "faith." The most offensive christian teaching is Peter's inspired proclamation "*Salvation is found in no one else [except Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*"⁸⁶ This truth we freely subscribe to. This much we cannot compromise.

Additionally: we are, sadly, confused with political ideologues who misuse scripture to support various political ends and who do not represent our hearts ...or God's. Christianity is founded on a theocratic rule of God in believers' lives. A believer's political affiliation or allegiance to a man-made government in this world—other than a desire to live

86. Acts 4:12

peaceably with all men⁸⁷—is not connected to their faith. Politics and the message of the Cross—which is the message of all scripture—have nothing in common. To support a political position with chapter and verse, the Word of God is misused for secular interests. Our sole interest is the reign of God in our lives!

The Christian's belief in Jesus as the only way to God is non-negotiable. Jesus, Himself, made this clear: *"I am the way and the truth and the life."* Jesus affirmed, *"No one comes to the Father except through me."*⁸⁸ But racists we are not. *"God does not show favoritism,"*⁸⁹ Peter learned. The citizens of heaven are represented by *all* the nations of the world.⁹⁰

*After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.*⁹¹

The message of the Cross transcends culture. Christianity is not a social order or a cultural phenomena. Our relationship with God is not a meme. The christian message is the revelatory word of reconciliation to God that God, Himself, has spoken forth. It is the power of God unto salvation. *"...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,"* Paul reminds us, *"but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*⁹²

87. Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

88. John 14:6

89. Acts 10:34

90. 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

91. Revelation 7:9

92. 1 Corinthians 1:18

The missionary council meeting in Jerusalem in 1928, speaking of the good news of this Gospel, sounded a clear and unmistakable call above the din of cultural voices. In one timely and timeless cry they trumpeted, *“It is first and foremost ‘Good News.’ It announces glorious Truth. Its very nature forbids us to say that it might be the right belief for some but not for others. Either it is true for all or it is not true at all.”*⁹³

Fellowship with believers from other countries is no longer just the privilege of select missionaries. Through social media and streaming video this is becoming a shared experience for many believers. Many believers have experienced the sheer joy of fellowship with other races and ethnic groups, even through a language barrier. What is really happening is that the Spirit of God brings us to a level of christian unity which defies a description in terms of this world. It is a taste of Heaven’s solidarity and harmony. There is no prejudice here. The term racism has no meaning in the language of heaven!

Striving for Greatness

Citizens under the reign of God are free to volunteer themselves in relationship with their Sovereign Lord. This is how the kingdom of God differs from the kingdoms of men. It is a volunteered service.⁹⁴ It is a servant’s heart. We are not governed by laws⁹⁵ but by *“the law of the Spirit”*⁹⁶ within. The principle is simple: *“...whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”*⁹⁷

93. DuBose. p. 342

94. 1 Peter 2:16 [English Standard Version] Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

95. Galatians 5:23 against such there is no law

96. Romans 8:2 through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free

97. Matthew 20:27

It is each submitting to one another, allowing ourselves to be served,⁹⁸ willingly accepting the grace of God without reservation, it is *“doing the will of God from your heart.”*⁹⁹ The secret of greatness in God’s world is *service*. *“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*¹⁰⁰

This dynamic of the Kingdom, already being taught us, confronts the interest of greatness by society’s definition. When Jesus *“made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant”*¹⁰¹ He confounded the best efforts of the philosophical minds of His day to appreciate what gave Calvary its empowerment to provide salvation. There is no manmade logic in God becoming a servant! Is this not the proverbial rock too heavy for the Creator to lift! If God in the person of Christ is the servant, who is above Him, then?¹⁰²

How little sense serving makes as an act of greatness! But here God gave us insight into His kingdom, the principle by which peace and love reign, by which we become one with Him!

The world of men cannot understand what any of this means! They see greatness in a competitive and winning spirit. They see greatness in striving for success. Wars are fought and violence is the product of working to advance personal interests, possess what is another’s right to have, and the sheer passion to be “number one.”

We are people of faith who in humble service only want God to be great.

98. Ephesians 5:21

99. Ephesians 6:6

100. Mark 9:35

101. Philippians 2:7

102. Luke 20:41, 44 Then Jesus said to them, “Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?

*I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.*¹⁰³

We are in this world but clearly not of it!

A Relative Morality

The largest difference between The Kingdom within us and the world at large has to do with principles of conduct. Believers are often misinformed by church organizations attempting to define what is and what isn't spiritual, what is or isn't "sin."

Even God's people appreciate the stability of traditional teachings that set the standards on a level of conduct easy for them to follow. Many church-goers, which include true believers, are comfortable in their faith because the church says so. But some of this isn't biblically realistic nor does it represent the real dispute between our allegiance to God and an evolving secular society.

We do not follow codes or laws or regulations. We are being made into *the image of Christ*.¹⁰⁴ We are to be holy *as He is* holy.¹⁰⁵ God's holiness is not a standard of conduct; God's holiness is the natural expression of His person. We are being transformed into a people who truly know God, what is the natural passion of His great heart and what is His will for us. We are a people who can spontaneously and naturally follow His sovereign will. His love expressed becomes our love toward

103. John 17:14

104. 2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

105. 1 Peter 1:15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

one another.¹⁰⁶ Fellowship¹⁰⁷ and unity¹⁰⁸ among us take on a new dimension and depth as that of the Father and His Son.

Heaven's model is an entirely other model not possible in the kingdoms of men. The new social concept for defining morality is: living happy within the boundary of one's own personal 'space,' without offense to another. Political correctness, or political identity, has fine-tuned this creed into an individualism that promotes the right of each person to define who and what they are or want to be. There is no absolute morality here. There is here a complete disinterest in seeking a relationship with a holy God.

106. John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

107. 1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

108. John 17:11 Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Living as Foreigners

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:13-16

Of a truth: “*Our citizenship is in Heaven....*”¹⁰⁹

Most of life for a believer seems a banal existence like a bird in a cage jumping from roost to roost, work to home and home to work. But a believer’s sojourn in this world is far from what it seems; for, we are in preparation for the world to come.¹¹⁰ We are, in reality, living our lives in the light of eternity. Our true treasures are stored in heaven awaiting our arrival.¹¹¹

109. Philippians 3:20

110. Romans 9:23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory

111. Matthew 6:20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Our thoughts should be on these eternal realities and not always on the worries of the day.¹¹² We should be blessed with a holy peacefulness and not like those who are plagued with constant effort to keep the dishes spinning on the sticks. The Lord's advice is worth listening to, "*...in quietness and trust is your strength...*"¹¹³

We should not view the news of the day, incessantly Eeyorish, nor interpret it, since we are now citizens of Heaven, as if the events of this life alone govern all our tomorrows. There is an emotional distance we can maintain when we realize we are strangers here but citizens there—in the Kingdom of God. We can be thoughtful but calm in our response to the worse of the worse since we know that even if the world implodes in violence, our God reigns!

We are in a real sense foreigners in a strange land. *Strange* is an appropriate word since even the language we speak is unknown to the world we find ourselves in.

Faith

Many terms we use sound similar to the ear of those who live near us but society has counterfeited many of our words. The meanings altered, they are able to ridicule what we are passionate about. Our faith, for one:

Faith to us is not just a belief system or a religious creed. Faith to us is not accepting with a level of cognitive dissonance something unknowable. Faith is not even a belief in miracles. Faith to us is the first step into a rich communion with God. Faith defines who we are as children of the Kingdom. Faith is the desire to know God in every aspect of life.

112. 2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

113. Isaiah 30:15

It is worth the space to take a closer look at a truth the society at large is incapable of grasping. In my work, "Challenged." I wrote:

*"But here, I am specifically understanding faith as an awareness of that relationship we enjoy with God and which is well documented in the record of Scripture. Faith, then, is the source of all conviction and confirmation in the existence of God. Peter in his second epistle, chapter one, explains that our christian way of life is built upon this foundation. He wrote here of urgency and commitment to build upon our faith.... He affirmed that this sums up the promises of God and in building on our faith this way, we become like Christ. This is the fulfillment of all the promises. If we need to know that the grace of God is active in our lives, here it is. If we need to be at peace about our circumstances, here it is. If we need an assurance that when Christ returns we are numbered with the saints, here it is. [An entrance into the Kingdom of God] ... If we need to find a way to be victorious over temptations, here it is. And it is all built on one unshakeable foundation: Faith."*¹¹⁴

Grace

Grace is another mysterious idea to society that even believers can claim only an introductory knowledge. We call it unmerited favor or God's gift given us, who are undeserving. We even have an acrostic: *God's Riches At Christ's Expense*.¹¹⁵ Unintentionally, perhaps, Taylor Lewis gave us the best definition:

*"[One] may know that a thing is, that it must be, though not how it is. ... a region of the divine emotional, most intensely real, — more real, if we may make degrees, than knowledge or intellectuality — the very ground, in fact, of the divine personal being."*¹¹⁶

114. Challenged.p. 22

115. Another acrostic would be: *God's Reach At Calvary Extended*.

116. Lange, John Peter. Vol 1, Page 288

Grace is God giving of Himself to us, sharing His glory, preparing us to live with Him in full and unfettered harmony. Grace is the process by which God reveals His great heart to us, in which He makes available to us the resources of His heaven, His world, His glory. Grace is God's provision to sleep through a storm, it is the gift of His peace that passes understanding [another word whose meaning society has changed]. God's grace is the living presence of the Spirit about a believer in their time of tragedy or deepest need. It is God's abiding presence, made known by faith, that supports us when we cannot stand alone.¹¹⁷

Love

And what is *love*? God is love, the Apostle John teaches.¹¹⁸ As we probably have learned already, but it bears repeating, the term love (agape) was introduced to the world through the Scriptures. The biblical meaning must put to silence the philosophical wrangling of generations of deep thinkers. A world that does not believe in the existence of the God of this love, cannot possibly know what this love is all about. But believers do. And believers own a rich and varied testimony of God's love shared among them.

The closest to a defining moment is Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 13, a beloved portion used at weddings (which shows how little we do grasp the concept as a society).

Verse 5 might offer words of advice to political pundits who tend to heighten social tensions, not assuage them: "*Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*" [There are dozens of sermons here!]

Just for our information: *easily angered* means provoked to anger, exasperated, a sharpening of tensions between combatants. Oh, and the word *easily* is *NOT* written in this verse. Someone thought it would be more realistic sounding to

117. Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

118. 1 John 4:8

use this term. Love, however, tones down tensions, encourages forgiveness and reconciliation because it is never self-serving. Love is the catalyst for unity and peace. Love was most on display on Calvary!¹¹⁹ Love, indeed, is God!

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Fruit of the Spirit are by definition spiritual qualities as a result of the Spirit's work within each believer. These 9 fruit should define us. These 9 traits should describe how believer's live. But this is a work of God that is under seige by cultural influences, and believers imperfectly profile what should represent Christ in us.

The fruit of the Spirit appear to be 9 ordinary terms of "good" people everywhere, but this is a false perception. I am reminded of what R. C. Trench concluded about such biblical terms: "...words often contain a witness for great moral truths—God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know..."¹²⁰

Believers by experience sense that these 9 divinely inspired characteristics exceed the definition of their counterparts in the world of men. Somehow the touch of God has quickened these terms, giving them applications to life that extend beyond the reach of mere mortal goodness.

1. **Love** is God.¹²¹
2. **Joy** is unspeakable and full of glory.¹²²

119. John 3:16

120. Trench. On the Study of the Words Lectures. p. 56

121. 1 John 4:8

122. 1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

3. **Peace** passes understanding.¹²³
4. **Forbearance** is a divine trait that extends beyond human endurance.¹²⁴ It excludes a vengeful spirit.¹²⁵
5. **Kindness** is moral excellence, a Christ-centered integrity, an aspect of holiness.¹²⁶ “...the christian temper of mind...as it effects... our relation to others.”¹²⁷
6. **Goodness** is another Biblical term, like love. “It occurs nowhere else but in the Greek translations of the O. T., in the N. T., and in writings directly dependent upon these.”¹²⁸
7. **Faith** or faithfulness is a divine gift.¹²⁹
8. **Gentleness** or meekness, a disposition to obey God, a synonym of a sweet and reasonable spirit, “..the exercise of the Christian temper in its outward bearing towards others.”¹³⁰
9. **Self-control**, a mastery over one’s passions and appetites. Such a common human trait but here inspired

123. Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

124. Romans 2:4 the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, ... that ...is intended to lead ... to repentance

125. Lightfoot. The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. p. 221

126. Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

127. Lightfoot. The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. p. 221

128. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament. p. 231f.

129. 2 Peter 1:1 To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.

130. Lightfoot. The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. p. 221

by grace. Peter builds self-control on a growing faith and knowledge of the Savior.¹³¹

Paul sums up a discussion of the Fruit of the Spirit. These are all the work of the Spirit in a believer, so there is no restriction or regulation that is sought to control them. Let the water of life flow forth!¹³² *“Against such things there is no law.”*¹³³ So, *“if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*¹³⁴

The Language of Faith

The language of faith is the language of the Spirit and we have only begun to learn to speak and understand a few words. There is, indeed, a depth of meaning that will take the experiences of Heaven before God can share all. Obviously, biblical ideas are translated into our vernacular but this, too, files down the sharp emphases. Learning the language of faith takes the Spirit within, and He is faithful.

*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*¹³⁵

But believers are also capable of speaking the common language which is far less confrontational. We can blend in among the citizenry of the local culture by keeping our understanding of God’s Word to ourselves and give the world around us the impression we enjoy their friendship. Paul’s caution may go unheeded while we are assimilated into a more peaceful relation with a society he called “wicked” and “dark” and we noticeably struggled to identify with.

131. 2 Peter 1:6

132. John 7:38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

133. Galatians 5:23

134. Galatians 5:18

135. John 13:16

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*¹³⁶

It seems cruel to call the world around us “wickedness” and “darkness.” Paul’s choice of words seem over the top in terms of how we feel about our neighbors, family, and age-old friendships but the word “fellowship” is correct. Among other believers, we can speak the language of our hearts. We can freely enjoy the witness of spiritual friendships that encourage our understanding of Truth and keep our true citizenship before us as we live in this world. In reality, fellowship itself *is* a glimpse of heavenly things and we should be seeking out opportunity to be with other believers. We need to feed on each others thoughtful discoveries in the Word and find strength and comforting support in each other’s faithfulness.¹³⁷

136. 2 Corinthians 6:14

137. 2 Corinthians 1:4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Personal Thoughts

I am tempted to raise the political issues of the day to point out how little relevance they have in our lives other than to fret us about bridges we may never come to. In 1973-4, while in the drawn out and worrisome process of transitioning with my family from one ministry to another, I was not even aware of the so-called “Saturday Night Massacre” episode of the Watergate scandal and an impeachment inquiry against, then, President Nixon. My mind was on other things while I waited in long gas lines with my 2 dollars for a little gas or cleaned elementary school facilities as a part time custodian or argued with the wife about better times to come.

Nixon, who? While the country no doubt took sides or grew enraged at the political shenanigans that had to answer to a Congressional oversight of the national interests, I went to work, did a little teaching at a local Bible school, eventually came home, locked myself in a hot bath while listening to the ball game on my tiny portable radio, and then dove into bed until the next cycle hit. It wasn't the best approach to solving the problems of life, I grant you, but I would inevitably learn. Yet, on the plus side, the political turmoil was off my radar—and that was, for me, a good thing!

What I am learning is that this world is not my home. There is great comfort in knowing that everything God is doing or allowing in our lives as believers is a view to preparing us for

His world. We should not compare the trials of this life with the glories of the next.

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*¹³⁸

Perhaps, enough has been said to make the point that we should be living this life with a focus on the next. It is the way of a peaceful co-existence with the many challenges we face. We should keep in mind that our true citizenship is not in the country we find ourselves domiciled. We should allow God to remind us through His Word of the promises of His providence and protection ...and then sleep well at night.

In a phrase: *Heaven is our true home.*

It 's Personal

Becoming emotionally involved in the political chaos of the times disturbs our peace and takes our thoughts away from the spiritual reality, our relation with God, that in actuality supports and nurtures us. Our personal history is being written by the providence of the God Who called us to serve Him. No politician has a say in that matter. We should view the “news” as simply the ongoing histrionics of a government (or maybe, Press) that mistakenly thinks it has broken free from God’s control. Watch the drama unfold.

It is important for our sense of equilibrium, while the political world quakes about us, to spend time in God’s Word and christian fellowship. It is important we maintain perspective, that we can envision in our minds—as Isaiah did—God high and lifted up upon His throne. In the biblical account, there was political unrest because the king of 4 decades was gone. ...but God was there ...still seated ...still reigning!

138. 2 Corinthians 4:18

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.¹³⁹

Don't take the issues of the day personally. We are truly insulated from bad news and news that is more editorial than fact if we continue to find our christian experience our primary reality, if we wrap our hearts in the message of Calvary, if we allow ourselves those personal moments in prayer when God through His Word says something special to us, reminding us that He is working on the problem.

But the overarching truth, again, is that everything the Spirit does in our lives—and there's a lot—is but the first moments of an eternity to come. We may need to turn the news off to remind ourselves that the Kingdom of Heaven is already here.

139. Isaiah 6:1

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