



CAPITOL COMMISSION

How to Become a Citizen of Heaven

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-7, 3:9

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Citizenship in America and the state of West Virginia provides us with tremendous privileges. We can all be thankful we live in a land of such freedom and opportunity. We are aware of those from other countries who seek to come to the USA, many of which go through the process to become American citizens. There a number of steps to follow: residency requirements, learning the English language, basic knowledge of American history and government, and more. The swearing in ceremony with its recitation of the oath of allegiance is an exciting event for those who have worked long and hard to become citizens. As we saw last week, Paul describes these believers as “citizens of heaven” (Phil. 3:20) and encourages them to live worthy of their citizenship (1:27). This brings up an important question:

How do you become a citizen of heaven?

Paul is writing to those in Philippi who are already citizens of heaven and does not directly deal with this question. However, he has much to say in his letter to give us the answer. You might recall from last week’s study how at the beginning of the church in Philippi, the jailor responsible for guarding Paul asked the all-important question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”. Paul and Silas gave him the answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...” This is the answer on how to become a heavenly citizen. Paul describes this change in their lives throughout his letter to the Philippians. He writes of the *grace* of God (1:2, 1:7, 4:23), the undeserved favor God has shown them. He talks about the *gospel*, the “good news” of what Christ has done nine times. He writes of those “whose names are in the book of life” (4:3). Significantly, in addition to “citizens of heaven” he calls the believers “*saints*” (1:1; 4:21-22).

Paul is writing to believers, to all those in Philippi who have trusted Jesus for salvation. We see this in his greeting “...to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi...” He identifies them as “*saints*”. This does not refer to some special class of believer but rather describes all those who have had their sins forgiven through faith in Christ. The word means one who has been consecrated or set apart. It is used 61 times in the New Testament, *always* referring to *all* believers. Paul writes to the saints

at Rome (Romans 1:7), the saints at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), and the saints at Ephesus (Eph. 1:1), referring to all the believers in those cities. It is a term that means “set apart”. It does not refer to one who is perfect. It refers to those who have had their sins forgiven, thereby being set apart by God to honor Him and live for Him. Just as Paul encourages the believers to live worthy of citizenship, his use of the name “saints” encourages believers to live up to such a designation.

OUR DESPERATE CONDITION APART FROM HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

In other letters, Paul gives us an idea of our desperate condition apart from being citizens of heaven. He uses imagery similar to that of citizenship to describe which “country” or “kingdom to which we belong.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Col 1:13-14

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

Gal. 1:3-4

In Ephesians 2 Paul gives a sobering description of our condition as sinners before we place our faith in Christ.

...Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Eph. 2:12-13

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household...

Eph 2:19

The descriptions stand out. We were in the domain of darkness, under this present evil age, excluded from God’s people, strangers to His promises, far off, strangers, and aliens. All these describe those who are **NOT** citizens. Paul writes of those who are not

BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON, TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)
LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDIES: THURSDAYS 8:00 A.M. & NOON SEN. PRES. CONF. RM. (M219)

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citizens of heaven in Philippians in 3:19, “Their end is destruction...” as they fall under the judgment of God. However the contrast is striking for those who trust Christ. The believer is transferred to the kingdom of God’s Son, rescued from this evil age, brought near by the blood of Christ, and members of God’s household. What a change! How do we experience this change? How do we become citizens of heaven?

HOW WE CAN BECOME HEAVENLY CITIZENS

In detailing how one becomes a heavenly citizen, Paul shares two amazing passages in Philippians. First, he writes of what Jesus did so that we might have our sins forgiven and become “saints” and “citizens”:

*⁶Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **Philippians 2:6-8***

Here he is using Jesus’ example to encourage the Philippian believers to put others first, to look out for the interests of others, and to serve others. He is describing how they should live as “citizens of heaven”. But in so doing, Paul vividly describes what Jesus did so that we can have our sins forgiven and become citizens of heaven.

In chapter two Paul describes his own Christian life and his desire to know Christ. In doing so, he clearly lays out what it means to be a heavenly citizen, and how a person becomes one:

*⁹That I...may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith... **Philippians 3:9***

Note what Paul says about his relationship with Christ – about being a heavenly citizen. First, **we cannot become citizens of heaven by our own righteousness.** “Righteousness” simply means the goodness that is required in order to be right with God and to be a citizen of heaven. If anyone could have done so based on what he had done, it would have been Paul. Look at the list he

presents in 3:5-6. Yet with all those human accomplishments, he says they are worthless in having a right relationship with God. This point is vital. We cannot earn our way to heaven. We cannot gain God’s favor by anything we do. With Paul we might compile our own list of our good works and accomplishments. With Paul we must come to see they are worthless. Consider Ephesians 2:8-9: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**

Next, we see that becoming a heavenly citizen means **we need a righteousness that comes from God.** This is what was provided by Christ in His sinless life. Christ died, bearing the punishment for our sin, so that our sins could be forgiven, and His goodness and righteousness could be given to us.

Finally, we see this transaction takes place **through faith in Christ and on the basis of faith.** It is when we trust in Christ as the only way of salvation that our sins are forgiven, Christ’s righteousness and goodness are credited to us, and we become saints and citizens of heaven. Remember Paul & Silas’ answer to the Philippian jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”. Faith simply means to believe what God says. We must believe what He says about our sinful condition –that we have all sinned and fallen short of His Glory. We must believe what He says about how to be right with Him, that it is through faith in what Christ did for us on the cross.

CONCLUSION

Philippians is a tremendously encouraging letter. In it Paul shares the blessings, privileges, and responsibilities of being citizens of heaven. Before going on in our study however, we needed to look at the important question of how we become citizens of heaven.

- **YOU MAY HAVE NEVER TRUSTED CHRIST FOR SALVATION. PERHAPS YOU’VE BEEN DEPENDING ON YOUR OWN DEEDS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS. IF SO, PLEASE CONSIDER PAUL’S DESIRE TO GAIN A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES FROM GOD ON THE BASIS OF FAITH IN CHRIST.**
- **AS BELIEVERS, WE CONSIDER ALL THAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR US AND OUR POSITION AS “SAINTS AND CITIZENS” AS THE MOTIVATION TO LIVE FOR HIM IN THE CHALLENGES OF OUR DAILY LIVES.**

West Virginia

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