

Virtuous Citizenship

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Citizenship; Kingdom of God; Humility; Sacrifice / Philippians 2:1–4; Philippians 2:14–18

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Citizenship, like membership, has its privileges and rights. Citizens in the modern world, especially in countries that are democratic or republic in nature, have some say in the role of government, perhaps even voting rights. Citizenship also traditionally means that one is due a certain level of protection from one's government. Non-citizens, no matter how permanent their status, are usually limited in these three areas. Citizenship also has its responsibilities and duties; citizens are expected to take part in the political process, to the extent granted by law, citizens are generally expected to serve in the military defense of their country when called on to do so. These are just a few things that citizens should be doing.

As Paul writes his Epistle to the Philippians, he knows that likely many of them are Roman citizens. Ancient Roman citizenship was a big deal. Not everyone had it. In fact, *most* people who lived in the empire were not Roman citizens. But Philippi was a retirement colony for honorable citizens, mostly military veterans. They were proud of their service, proud of their status, and proud of their citizenship. Paul takes the idea of pride in citizenship but adds a twist. Strive at being a citizen, sure! But remember that you are a citizen of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Your loyalty no longer lies first with any country and for us here today that would be the United States of America. Christ has redeemed you, forgiven you, and now lives with you. He has made you a new citizen of the kingdom of heaven. In this kingdom, glory, and status are not great virtues; the great virtue is humility. That is to say:

The citizen of Christ's Kingdom considers others more significant than himself.

If we have reason to live as citizens worthy of Christ's Kingdom, it is by work of the triune God! And do we ever!

Christ Jesus humbled himself to make us citizens. Here what Paul says:

English Standard Version Chapter 2

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of

men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is great encouragement as Paul says, “If there is any encouragement in Christ.”

The Father comfort us with his perfect love, demonstrated in the life and work, death and resurrection of Jesus. For it as God the Father who

English Standard Version Chapter 2

highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Holy Spirit binds us to God and to one another, creating Christian affection and sympathy.

English Standard Version Chapter 2

any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

The humility of the King sets the way its citizens look at others. Hear again from God’s Holy Word:

English Standard Version Chapter 2

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Citizens of Christ’s kingdom are not driven by selfish ambition or conceit.

English Standard Version Chapter 2

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves

That’s hard to do in today’s world. Ever since mankind fell into sin it’s been a “me-first” society. It’s been about what I want, not what the other person wants. The amount of conversations I have shows that you and I are selfish. It’s all about what I want! It’s all about what makes me happy! It’s all about my comfort level! I want you to do this for me!

Citizens of Christ’s Kingdom count others more significant than themselves after the interests of others. This is difficult today. It’s been difficult since the fall into sin. Did Adam keep his wife’s interests ahead of his. Absolutely not.

When it comes to our selfish behavior, we grumble! Grumbling has been going on to since the beginning of time. Israel as they left Egypt grumbled against their leader Moses and their ultimate leader God himself. The people in the days of Ezekiel were grumbling...

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‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’

Oh and not to mention the Chief Priest and the elders of the people grumbled against Jesus asking him:

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“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

Grumbling is nothing new oh don’t we do it well. Over the last six months the grumbings have only grown louder. We grumble over such things as masks or not wearing them. I grumble at those who don’t wear them. We grumble over elections, government decisions, and even who the best football team or baseball team. We are all sinners, we are good at grumbling. I’m probably the first one to complain when the first snowflake is seen in the sky.

Look who isn’t grumbling. Paul...and he is sitting in a prison cell. Look who else isn’t grumbling - Jesus. We don’t do these things so that you may be blameless. Yet, on our own we aren’t blameless. We are all to blame for the issues in our lives. We are all sinners. There is one that takes away the blame. Christ Jesus - the one who humbled himself to the point of death even death on a cross. Jesus Christ is the perfect citizen of the kingdom of God for you. He’s the perfect citizen because he puts himself the lowest. He puts himself the lowest by the way of the cross. He puts himself the lowest when he washed his disciples feet. He put himself the lowest by being born of woman and being a human. He did this all for you.

And the Father exalted him for you! So...

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15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life

He gives you the ability to be humble and to put others ahead of yourselves. This is seen in the citizens of the Kingdom of God as the King’s work flows through our lives.

We shine as lights in the world. Let’s be the church that lives out the gospel call, even during these days when things are turned upside down. Maybe you’ve had the opportunity to share Christ with someone during these odd days we find ourselves. The Church is called to be the light. We have a message of light and hope and peace in a world that is dark. Let your gospel light shine, there are so many ways to do that for people today...

a phone call, a letter, a colored picture, a drive by visit, an encouraging word, a care package. We can be creative how our light shines!

As we let our light shines we anticipate our resurrection in Christ - a day we all long for.

As you shine as light we hold on to the Word of Life...the Word of Life that God gives to us. This Word of Life grounds all humility and good works in the power of presence of Christ.

This Word of Life continuously reminds and not only reminds us it offers to us the forgiveness and life that we have in Christ. It continually reminds that the times we do grumble, the times that we do dispute, the times that we aren't humble and think of ourselves above others, Christ still forgives. We can give God thanks that he does that for us!

Yes, the citizens of Philippi were proud of their citizenship in the Roman Empire and they had reason to be. Today, even with the strife in our country today, we have the right to be proud to be an American. Let not that be the primary kingdom that you live in though. We are United States Citizens, but first and foremost your identity, your citizenship is in the Kingdom of God...that citizenship is eternal...and that gives you all the more reason to rejoice. God is still in control. God gives us the reason to be glad and rejoice with St. Paul and with one another. It also gives us a joyous reason to be humble.

So this week think of ways that you can put someone else above yourself...

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.