

# *CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP*

By  
Giuseppe Guarino

# CITIZENSHIP

Philippians 3:20, “For our **citizenship** is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” - NKJV

The Greek word translated *conversation* in the KJV and translated *citizenship* in the NKJV as well as in other translations, is πολιτευμα (reads, *politeyuma*). The literal and immediate translation of this word is *citizenship*. It fits the context and we will consider it, if not the correct one, the more correct one.

J.B. Lightfoot is among the greatest New Testament Greek scholars. In his Commentary to the Greek text of Philippians, he renders the ideas behind this passage as follows: “In heaven we have even now our country, our home; and from heaven hereafter we look in patient hope for a deliverer, even the Lord Jesus Christ...”

The idea behind *citizenship* was very well known to the Christians in Philippi. It explains the use of the term here.

For example, it would mean a lot to speak of citizenship to an American, an Italian or a citizen of any other free and rich western country. But may be it would not mean much to people who are forced to flee from their native countries and their citizenship.

The Philippians must have enjoyed a good treatment inside the Roman Empire, so they knew the implications and importance of Roman citizenship to live a peaceful and free life. Not everyone who lived within the boundaries of the Roman Empire had the privilege to be a citizen.

So, Paul’s analogy perfectly fits the context and implies a very deep meaning, strongly remind the reader where their true home and country is and how far better and more important are the privileges of the *citizenship* of heaven.

Paul was a Roman citizen. This granted him a difference of treatment when authorities dealt with him. In Acts 22:28, we read: “And the commander answered, "I acquired this (Roman) Citizenship (Greek: πολιτειας) with much money." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen.”

The same Greek word is also found in Ephesians 2:12, which reads in the KJV, “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth (*citizenship*) (Greek: πολιτεια) of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

Roger M. Smith is Professor of Government at Yale University. He writes about the American Citizenship.

“What does it mean to say, "I am an American citizen?" The law supplies dry technical answers: the statement means that one falls under a constitutional or statutory category conferring full membership in the American polity. [...] Yet in saying these words, most Americans surely mean to express more than their juridical status under national law. They are professing their sense of belonging to a unique nation, with a heritage of great deeds and tragic flaws, a shining set of ideals, vast resources, and a singularly commanding and demanding position in today's world. For many the sentence is also a revelation of their sense of self, of who, for better or worse, they feel themselves to be at the deepest emotional level. It has, then, much more than a merely legal meaning. It is at bottom a statement of political and personal identity that evokes complex, powerful, and often contradictory ideas and sentiments, for Americans and non- Americans alike.”

It would be quite educational if, in the above sentences, we change the word “American” for “Christian.”

Being a citizen of a nation requires obligations, but also gives rights and privileges.

How do you become a citizen?

➤ **Birth right is the most common and natural way**

In the New Covenant of Grace, we enter into the family of God through the New Birth.

John 3:3, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 1:11-13, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

1Peter 2:9-10, “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Let’s take a quick look at some of the implications of our citizenship in heaven.

# OBLIGATIONS

Among the obligations of a citizen are,

➤ **Know and obey the law**

We, as Christians, must know and obey the Word of God.

**James 1:22**, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

**Matthew 7:24**, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock”

In any Country, whether you know the Law or not, it is your problem, not your Government's. That Law is still in force and binding. And, in any decent country, keeping the law will cause you and your community nothing but good.

The wonderful thing about the Kingdom Laws is that they are based on love!

**Matthew 22:36-40**, “Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

**John 13:34-35**, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

**John 14:23**, “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

➤ **Speak the language**

We speak a language of wisdom, through the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 2:13**, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

We must speak a language of truth.

**Ephesians 4:25**, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”

We speak the language of the Gospel, speaking of reconciliation with God through Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 2:4**, “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

**Titus 3:2**, “To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, *but* gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.”

**James 4:11**, “Speak not evil one of another, brethren.”

**1 Peter 3:10**, “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.”

### ➤ **Pay taxes**

How can we expect a country to be well organized, ready to respond to its citizens’ needs, defends his borders, build a strong economy without its citizens paying their taxes?

The same question applies to the church. We may entertain different opinions about the amount of this contribution, but the Word gives us good indications about it.

**Malachi 3:8-12**, “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”

But we cannot think our contribution can be limited to money. These days, for some people it would be too easy.

If we follow the saying: “time is money”, we can understand how simple it is to show love to God by dedicating the best of our time to him.

God wants the best of us. It is so natural to give it to him if we realize how much God loves us and how much we owe to him.

# PRIVILEGES

A citizen has also privileges and rights. For Christians they are so many, that almost all the New Testament should be quoted here to number them.

We have

➤ **Become children of God**

**Ephesians 1:5**, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

**1 John 3:1**, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God”

➤ **Eternal life**

**John 3:16**, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

➤ **The Holy Spirit in us**

**Galatians 4:6**, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

➤ **Direct access to God**

**Hebrews 10:19**, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus”

**John 16:23**, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* you.”

➤ **Sins forgiven**

Colossians 2:13-14, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

➤ **Peace**

**Romans 5:1**, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**John 14:27**, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

➤ **Joy**

**Romans 15:13**, “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

➤ **Hope**

**2 Thessalonians 2:16**, “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace”

➤ **Freedom**

**John 8:36**, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

**Galatians 5:1**, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

# CONCLUSION

Since **we live far from Heaven**, with right it is written of us, that on this earth we are strangers and pilgrims.

**1Peter 2:11** – “Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

Our life here is only temporary, but our home in Heaven will be eternal.

**2Corinthians 5:1** – “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

**Hebrew 13:14** - “For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.”

In this world we represent Jesus, like Ambassadors represent their home countries in foreign lands.

**2Corinthians 5:20** – “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

**Ephesians 6:20** – “For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

We have been granted the greatest of all the privileges, to be called the sons and the daughters of God. Such position requires serious commitment to the cause of the Kingdom of God.