

Live as Citizens of Heaven

Live as aliens on a mission to this ungodly planet. Have values, desires and ways of dealing with people that are radically different from those of the world.

Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13-16; 1 Peter 1:17

You are already a citizen of heaven, even though you haven't gone to heaven yet. Philippians 3:20 in the Bible puts it to us this way: *"But our citizenship is in heaven."* Not, "will be" in heaven, but "is" in heaven – we are already citizens of that wonderful society we will enter after death.

One of the hardships of those who immigrate to a country from another civilization is learning to do things the way the new and unfamiliar culture does them. The more they can learn about the country they are moving to and adopt some changes in behavior before they arrive there, the better is their experience.

The advantage of living like you are citizens of heaven now with those believers in your Christian Inner Circle is to be able to participate at an advanced level of citizenship when you enter heaven.

To understand the advantage of living as a citizen of heaven now, consider the following. Those seeing ocean waves for the first time are delighted. But those who loved spending a childhood with those waves upon seeing them again will have a more exhilarating experience. They will match the waves with memories and emotions not available to those who are thrilled at seeing the waves for the first time. Similarly, if you are already familiar with the ways of heaven when you go there, you will have an advanced experience.

If we want to enter heaven already having a close relationship with God, we cannot put off kingdom living until we actually get to heaven. We should not say, "I think that I will wait until I get to heaven to try to please God and become closer to Him in relationship." It makes no sense to put off living the way of heaven until we get there.

There is a thrill in meeting someone for the first time. But there is no prior relationship. Imagine going to a reception for a famous Christian known personally by your companion. When you both are greeted by this famous person, is the experience the same for both of you? Not likely. The renown person will greet your friend more warmly with statements that witness prior relationship. Your friend will experience more inclusion. On the other hand, you will be greeted with formal pleasantries, a wonderful experience but not as wonderful as that of your friend's. You will be excited to have made the person's acquaintance and experience no hurt or disappointment. But, you will probably be aware of the deeper experience for your friend.

We don't want to meet up with God in heaven with barely a relationship. We want to meet the King in his palace having lived like His citizen before getting there. Since God's way of living in the kingdom now is fulfilled by living as an actual citizen of heaven, doing so is critical for a closer relationship with God.

Living like citizens of heaven now before death will gain some heavenly benefits that might not be available to us after we get to heaven. Some spiritual qualities cannot be acquired without sinful surroundings.

Some of us, to a greater degree than others, will have separated ourselves from those things in our secular

culture that do not fit within the kingdom of God. Trading those ways for the higher, more loving and constructive ways of the kingdom of heaven will bring to us ways of living that we will cherish for all eternity.

We need to ask God what we have in our lives from the culture we live in that belongs in His kingdom and what does not. Then, with one another's help we must let go of what does not belong in the society of the church.

Some of us will have adopted the ways of the kingdom of God to deal with hard things in this life. Our spirits will change to cherish those gifts from heaven such as peace of mind in the midst of trial and hope in the face of defeat. Such strong peace and hope, previously developed against sin and hardship, will magnify our experience of peace and hope in heaven.

Those of us, for example, who really appreciated truth in the midst of a culture where half-truths and deceit entered into so much of life will be excited when we see everyone truthful in heaven. Those caught up in the deceitful nature of the secular world will appreciate that whatever is said in heaven will be trustworthy, but they may not experience the same level of joy. Truth without deceit will be wonderful for those new to being truthful, but to others it will be familiar and feel more like who they have already been.

Here is another example. Citizens of heaven while on earth are to examine each other's faith. But secular culture says that we should mind our own business. On earth we have to choose one or the other, the culture of heaven or the culture of this world. Unfortunately, it appears that most Christians think everyone's spiritual growth is their own business. But, in the kingdom of heaven spiritual purity is everyone's concern because it reflects on God whom they love dearly.

In heaven those who cared enough to go with God's way of examining the faith of Christian friends, Christian family members and Christian spouse rather than just focusing on their own life will enter heaven as far different people. First, they will be entrusted with reward assignments requiring more already-developed other-centeredness. Second, they will enjoy the spiritual progress of others for all eternity at a much higher level. All that earthly practice of examining the faith of others and helping them through love to grow in Christ will give them greater ability to be happy for someone other than themselves. Those with no or little experience in the spiritual holiness of those in their Christian Inner Circles will learn to focus on others in heaven, but not be qualified for careers in heaven requiring spirits that already delight in another's spiritual progress.

Now is the time to choose that you want a higher quality of life in eternity.

On the other side of the pearly gates we may not be aware of having been poor citizens of heaven beforehand. That will be forgiven and probably forgotten. Nevertheless, there will be rewards handed out in heaven. These rewards will relate to having been good stewards of heavenly citizenship back before death when it was tough to do so.

A person who has a habit of showing up to work consistently late will not be made a supervisor. Past performance signifies what we are capable of doing. The same principle applies to places of service for all eternity in heaven. For what jobs will we each be qualified?

Here is just one specific example. Consider a Christian named Joe who hardly ever took a risky step to encourage another Christian to stop some particular sin. In heaven, even though no one will be sinning, it will be unlikely that Joe will be assigned much responsibility in leading people to take difficult steps to grow their faith.

Now is the time that together we can help those in our Christian Inner Circles live bravely as citizens of heaven and qualify for better rewards in the never ending life to come. As the people of God, we must continually help the kingdom of heaven grow in our lives and in the lives of our Christian friends, family

members, and spouses.

When you are with those Christians closest to you, why not point out to them the things in our culture that will not be in heaven. It might be attitudes, goals, activities, behaviors, ways of talking, and, especially, priorities. This will help separate them and you from that which does not belong in our lives as citizens of heaven.

One convenient way to examine ourselves and those in our Christian Inner Circles is to pay attention to television ads. Almost all of them highlight things and values that do not belong in the kingdom of God. They try to convince us that our happiness can come from owning an expensive car, from partying with alcohol, from buying a cell phone we don't need just because it has new special features, and many other temptations. If anything looks attractive but out of place with respect to kingdom of God values, we can discuss with our closest Christian friends and relatives the kingdom values we need to adopt to overcome such desires.

The world will pay more attention to our together faith, especially if we are helping one another to live like we will actually be in heaven soon. Jesus said, *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* We need to pay much more attention to the Christian lifestyle together and its difficult ways of loving.

Just imagine the reaction of an unbeliever within earshot if a friend of yours is upset about something. Perhaps your friend is disappointed because things did not go the way desired, or an unexpected expense made it impossible to buy something wanted. Or maybe the person was not treated right. You say to her or him, "It doesn't matter. Let it go. We are headed to heaven, and such things of this life don't really matter all that much." Hearing the reality of heaven and your certain citizenship there will give the observing unbeliever something to think about!

The 65 Togethers of Scripture are God's commanded way for Christians to live with and love one another. If Christians saw themselves first as citizens of heaven and lived out the Togethers, we would live quite differently from the secular culture.

One of the main things that should be most visible and quite shocking to those outside the kingdom of heaven is the way we deal with one another's sinfulness. As citizens of heaven, we help! We do not condemn. We do not turn away from another as long as we can find a way to rescue that other Christian from evil. Christ's death for our sin should set us apart as truly different people.

Sometimes Christians try to fit in to secular culture too much. This makes it quite difficult to live like citizens of heaven. As citizens belonging to God, our desires and our relationships are to be radically different from human society.

We need to be okay as citizens of heaven and comfortable with living as God's children. Let those outside the faith watch how citizens of heaven live with one another. To do this, we need to make the kingdom of heaven a distinct priority so that there is something for outsiders to see. Together within our Christian friendships, Christian families, and Christian marriages, we need to live openly before and peacefully with those who are not yet citizens of heaven.

As ambassadors of heaven here for a time on earth, we are empowered by God to make a constructive contribution. Imagine what it would be like if thousands of aliens came to our world, aliens who could only do good things for us. Well, guess what? We are those aliens! Believe it – Christians are supernatural in that the Holy Spirit lives in us and strengthens us to love others with God's love. And, there are millions of us who can live empowered by God for superior love and action.

So, we are to live together as citizens of heaven in our Christian friendship groups, Christian families and Christian marriages. We are ambassadors to the world we were born in – a culture to which we no longer truly belong. Jesus in His wonderful prayer recorded in John 17 says of us to God the Father, *"they are*

not of the world any more than I am of the world.”

So, let's live as aliens on a mission to this ungodly planet. Let's be ever changing our values, desires and ways of dealing with people to those of the kingdom of heaven.

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There is more about living as citizens of heaven at our website ChristiansTogether.org. Just go down the list of the Togethers and click on “Live as Citizens of Heaven”.

Prayer to Embrace this Together

Sovereign King of the Kingdom, I and those in my Christian Inner Circle will need Your help to grow our spirits to live as citizens of heaven before we get there. Help us to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit for all of us to give You more glory by believing and behaving like we already have citizenship in heaven, which we do.

Please help us all to become more like Jesus and elevate the kingdom of God and our citizenship in that kingdom so that it is more important than our citizenship in our country. Jesus understood that the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than priceless pearls and jewels. May all in my Christian Inner Circle be helped to so value it.

May our lives worship You more because we value Your ways in Your kingdom so that in our interactions with unbelievers we show that we belong not to this world, and value this world in different ways than they. Help us to let unbelievers peek into Your kingdom, especially when they can see our extraordinary and supernatural love of other believers.

Make us strong in Your power to defeat the devil by living as citizens of heaven living Your way, not his. Satan has always wanted to steal Your kingdom and glory from You, beginning in heaven and corrupting angels into demons and then bringin sin to Earth. So, empower us through the Holy Spirit to not live with errant world values, but live out heaven here on Earth.

Help us all to prepare for heaven by learning how to live in Your kingdom in heaven before we get there. Help us to guide one another to follow the Holy Spirit and live as citizens of heaven under the temptations of worldly citizenship. Since it does not exist in heaven, empower all of us to give up selfishness. Watching out for the good of others is the way of heaven, so let it be that way with us.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.