

# The Importance of Our Heavenly Citizenship

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In grade school, I remember daily reciting the pledge of allegiance to the American flag. During my time at John Brown University in the early 1970's, patriotism was a quality that the leaders of the college promoted. There was a sense of pride in being an American. We live in a much different world today. Those who lead the U.S. disparage loyalty to the flag and regard those who seek to put America first as fascists. My intent here, however, is not to write about what's happening in the U.S., but rather explore the many benefits of a different citizenship.

In Philippians 3:20, Paul wrote, "*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" The word for "citizenship" is *politeuma*; it also denotes community; our word "politics" derives from it. According to author John Walvoord, the word assures the Christian "that in contrast to those just denounced, his real home is in heaven and that he is only temporarily related to this world, its governments, and its problems.[1] The residents of first century AD Philippi understood the value and meaning of citizenship. As a Roman colony, they enjoyed many of its privileges. They understood what it meant to display loyalty to a faraway city. The words of Philippians 3:20 would have captured the attention of Paul's readers and brought them considerable encouragement. They can do the same for us because our heavenly citizenship:

**SIGNIFIES LIVING FOR ETERNITY VERSUS THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.** Just before reminding the Philippians of their heavenly citizenship, the apostle warns them of those who live for the things of this world. In verses 17-19 he wrote: *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.* Paul had just finished telling them of his forward look to "the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (3:14). I believe that what Paul specifies as the "prize of the upward call" is Jesus' appearing. That's the time the Lord catches us up to meet Him "in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The apostle desired for his readers, and us, to copy his passion for the things above rather than those focused on satisfying earthly desires. Our heavenly citizenship signifies that our first allegiance belongs to Jesus and that we live for Him rather than put all our efforts into obtaining what the world offers.

**LEADS TO AN EAGER ANTICIPATION OF JESUS' APPEARING.** A proper understanding of our heavenly citizenship doesn't consist of a vague understanding of eternal life in a distant Heaven, but rather to an eager anticipation of Jesus' appearing. In Philippians 3:20, the Greek word for "await" points to an "intense anticipation" or an "excited expectation" of a future event.[2] Luke used this same Greek word for "await" in Acts 17:16 to describe Paul's restless "waiting" in Athens for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. After the apostle's distressing experiences in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, we know he intently watched and greatly longed for a reunion with his fellow laborers. As citizens of Heaven, it's only natural that we would ...

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