

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

The Path to Citizenship

By Andy Sochor

The debate over illegal immigration is a hot topic in our country. For various reasons, millions of people from other countries have decided their lives would be better in the United States of America. This country has always welcomed immigrants and has established a system through which they can go in order to obtain citizenship in the United States.

Many pursue residence in this country and later citizenship through the established legal path. Many others, however, begin their pursuit by entering the country illegally. There are now millions of “illegal immigrants” currently residing within our borders, resulting in a great political debate as to what to do about these individuals. Should they be made to follow the immigration laws that have already been established? Should the government enact some sort of new law that would grant citizenship to those who, for whatever reason, chose to ignore the current law and enter this country illegally.

We likely all have our opinions as to what we believe the civil authorities ought to do on this issue, but this is not the place to discuss those opinions. I bring this up because in this debate we can draw a spiritual application regarding the greatest and most blessed citizenship. As Christians, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Let us notice some parallels between our heavenly citizenship and the current immigration debate.

Great Desire for Citizenship

Just as there is a great desire for people around the world to come to the United States, there is also a desire for many to become citizens of heaven. People from around the world come to the United States primarily for two things – freedom and prosperity. These are similar to the blessings of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Christ offers freedom to those who will follow Him (Jn. 8:32; 2 Cor. 3:17) – freedom from sin (Rom. 6:17-18) and from the obligation to follow the commands of men (Col. 2:20-22). There is also the promise, not of material wealth, but of a greater inheritance in heaven when this life is over (1 Pet. 1:3-4; Matt. 6:19-21).

The Kingdom is Open to All

With the great blessings of citizenship, the desire of many to become part of the kingdom is to be expected. When Isaiah prophesied of the coming kingdom, he said, “*All the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths’*” (Isa. 2:2-3). Fortunately for us, Christ has made His kingdom open to all who wish to join it. The gospel of the kingdom was to be preached “*to all creation*” (Mk. 16:15). The apostles were to be His witnesses “*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). When Peter preached to those who would be the first Gentile converts, he said, “*I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him*” (Acts 10:34-35).

There Is a Path to Citizenship

As Christ made citizenship in His kingdom open to all, He also established a path to citizenship that any can follow in order to join. When He gave His apostles the Great Commission, He summarized the requirements for entrance into the kingdom: “*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved*” (Mk. 16:16). Luke’s account of this commission includes repentance also as a prerequisite (Lk. 24:47). When the kingdom

was established on the day of Pentecost, the ones who believed Peter's message were told, ***“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”*** (Acts 2:38). The Scriptures contain a consistent pattern of one having to meet these requirements – belief, repentance, and baptism – in order to be part of the kingdom of Christ.

We Cannot Establish Our Own Way

Many are not satisfied with the kingdom's law regarding how one obtains citizenship. Like the “illegal immigrants” in our country, they seek to establish their own path, then demand the full blessings and privileges that come from following the lawful path of citizenship.

Some try to pray their way into the kingdom of Christ (the “sinner's prayer”), yet Saul was not able to do this. After three days of prayer and fasting, he was told, ***“Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name”*** (Acts 22:16).

Some try to enter the kingdom by doing things they think will please God. But Jesus said, ***“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’”*** (Matt. 7:21-23).

We cannot enter the kingdom in any way other than the one way that Christ has established.

Conclusion

It is a great privilege to be a citizen of the United States. But greater is the privilege of being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. If you wish to become part of this kingdom, follow the path that Christ has given, lest you must be told in the end to depart. – ***Eastside church of Christ Articles.*** ■

Sheep Don't Wallow

Author Unknown

There is an old story about a lamb and its mother. It seems the lamb passed a pig pen each morning on the way to the pasture with its mother. Watching the pigs wallow in the mud seemed like fun and on an especially hot day the lamb asked his mother if he could jump the fence and wallow in the cool mud. She replied, “No.” Then the lamb asked the usual question, “Why?” The mother just said, “Sheep don't wallow.”

This did not satisfy the lamb. He felt she was not being fair, overreacting and didn't have the right to tell him what he could or could not do, etc. So, as soon as the mother was out of sight, the lamb ran to the pig pen and jumped the fence. He was soon feeling the cool mud on his feet, his legs, and soon his stomach. After a few moments he decided he had better go back to his mother, but he couldn't. He was stuck. Mud and wool don't mix. His pleasure had become his prison. He cried out and was rescued by the farmer. When cleaned and returned to the fold, the mother said, “Remember, sheep don't wallow.”

Sin is like that. It looks so nice, thinking we can escape when we wish, but it is not so. Pleasures become prisons.

Moral of the story: Christians don't wallow!! – ***Knollwood church of Christ Bulletin, August 2017.*** ■

“But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:22).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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