

THERE ARE NO DUAL CITIZENS IN HEAVEN!

Today's Text: Phil. 3: 1-21

Extracts:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus....For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself [Phil. 3: 13-21].

A dual citizen is a person who is regarded and treated as the national of two countries at the same time.¹ Such a person carries the passports of both countries of which s(he) is a citizen. In most cases, s(he) is born in one and acquires the other by naturalization through descent or by marriage, among others. Anwar al-Awlaki, best known as the leader of the al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, was born in USA in the State of New Mexico, when his father came for postgraduate studies from Yemen. He was thus an American and a Yemeni. In due course, he became a radical Islamic imam whose sermons inspired three of the 9/11 hijackers and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian who attempted the 2009 Christmas Day bombing of an American airliner. In April 2010, President Obama put al-Awlaki on the CIA watch list of terrorists that should be killed. His father and civil rights groups challenged the order in court on the ground that you could not by law kill an American citizen without due process. On 30 September 2011, he was killed in an American drone attack in Yemen.

Anwar al-Awlaki was an American citizen by birth and a Yemeni by descent. His father was a top member of the ruling class in Yemen, and that enabled him to hide and operate his terrorist empire from there. In the end, dual citizenship could not save him. So it is with us when we try to be citizens of the world (living in flesh) and of heaven (Spirit-led) at the same time. In today's Bible verses, Paul reminds believers in the Philippian church that they are citizens of heaven. There are no dual citizens in heaven. If you aspire to retire there after your sojourn on earth, you must live here as if you are already there. How can we do that? Let us find out from today's interesting study.

¹ Background information for this intro comes from the following sources: "Anwar al-Awlaki," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anwar_al-Awlaki, and "Dual citizenship countries," <http://www.best-citizenships.com/dual-citizenship-countries.htm>

1. Background: Characteristics of Heavenly Citizenship

The church of the Laodiceans was one of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation to which Christ sent His angels to deliver pungent messages about their spiritual state. Believers in that church saw themselves as rich and had “need of nothing.” But Jesus saw them differently. He said to them, “I know your works, that you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” [Rev. 3: 14-17].

To be hot is to be spiritually (or heaven-) minded; to be cold is to be carnally (or worldly) minded. The Laodicean church was said to be lukewarm, suggesting that it compromised its spiritual state in the pursuit of material success. Does that not look like modern day congregations where prosperity is preached at the expense of salvation? Yet, for believers to make heaven, they have to remain hot for Christ and His gospel of redemption. They have to choose which “country’s passport” they want to carry for the rest of their sojourn on earth.

At the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus taught His listeners the principles of praying, He said, “In this *manner*, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. ***Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven***” [Matt. 6: 9-10]. On another occasion, after He had finished praying, one of His disciples requested that He should teach them to pray as John the Baptist did with his disciples. Jesus replied, “When you pray, *say*: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. ***Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven***” [Lk 11: 1-2]. Therefore, the *Pater Noster* (Our Father, popularly called the Lord’s Prayer) is a clear affirmation that ***it is here on earth that we can apply for and obtain our heavenly citizenship. It will entail giving up our citizenship of this world and living on earth as saints [Ps. 16: 3] and the ambassadors for Christ [2 Cor. 5: 20]***. An embassy is an extension of its home country and its staff enjoy diplomatic immunity in the host country where it is located. ***What then does it imply for believers to see themselves as heaven’s envoys on earth? How can they obtain and retain such a valuable status with God? Those and more are some of the issues that we shall attempt to clarify in today’s study.***

Paul’s letter to the Philippian church gives us a good lead on this important matter. He wrote them, saying, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” [Phil. 3: 20]. Paul added, “For we are ***the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh***” [Phil. 3: 3]. That suggests that you must carry heaven’s passport even while still here on earth. The highlighted sections in the above quoted statement by Paul represent the characteristics of heavenly citizenship, which can be expatiated as follows:

a) *The circumcision*

Under the Law of Moses, every male child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth in accordance with the covenant that God had established with Abraham [Gen. 17: 10-12]. Even so, in his final instruction to the children of Israel in the wilderness on their way from Egypt, Moses said, “The LORD your *God will circumcise your heart* and the heart of your descendants, *to love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul*, that you may live” [Deut. 20: 6]. Therefore, Paul was showing the Philippians that an important mark of their heavenly citizenship is circumcision of the heart. How can that be done?

The law was given through Moses but “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” [Jn 1: 17]. Speaking to Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler that came to see Him by night, Jesus emphasised that, unless we are born again, that is, of water and of the Holy Spirit, we can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God [Jn 3: 3, 5]. The kingdom of God is not the same thing as the kingdom of heaven [Matt. 19: 23-24]. The kingdom of heaven is where the saints go to after death. The kingdom of God is a spiritual state, characterized by “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” [Rom. 14: 17]. It follows that all citizens of heaven, whether still living here on earth or already in heaven share the kingdom of God! *We are, therefore, circumcised in heart when we become born again; when we receive the baptism of water and of the Holy Spirit by which we can gain access to the kingdom of God.* It is a mark of our desire to live in the kingdom of heaven; it is our application for the citizenship of heaven.

b) *Worship God in the Spirit*

It is one thing to be born again and another to live as a born-again. God is not impressed by physical appearances but by the state of our hearts [1 Sam. 16:7]. By our fruits, we are known [Matt. 7:16]. *Therefore, to worship God in the Spirit is to obey His every word because obedience is better than sacrifice* [1 Sam. 15:22].

To whom much is given, much is expected. That is why God seems to be “harsher” with His chastising cane on those closer to Him than on the rest of us. For example, He spoke with Moses face-to-face [Num. 12: 8]. Yet, for striking the rock when he was commanded to speak to it, Moses was prevented from entering the Promised Land [Num. 20: 1-12]. Even when he prayed for mercy to enter, God said to him, “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter” [Deut. 3: 23-26]. David was a man after God’s own heart [1 Sam. 13:14]. Yet, when he repented after committing adultery and murder, God still visited the consequences of his sins on him and his family [2 Sam. 12: 1-14].

In the words of Peter the apostle, it is better not to have known the way of righteousness than to know it and relapse and become entangled in the evil

world we have forsaken for Christ's sake. That would be like a dog returning to its own vomit or a pig, having been washed, returning to wallow in the mire [**2 Pet. 2: 20-22**]. In the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman by the well, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" [**Jn 4: 21-24**]. ***Therefore, the true believer must not only be born again but must so live.***

c) *Rejoice in Christ*

Paul urged his brethren, members of the Philippian church, to "rejoice in the Lord" and again, "rejoice in Christ Jesus" [**Phil. 3: 1,3**]. To appreciate the significance of this expression, see the reaction of the twenty-four elders around the throne of God in heaven, as shown to John in a vision in the island of Patmos. As the Lamb (Christ Jesus) prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals, the elders fell down before Him and raised a new song, saying, "***You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth***" [**Rev. 5: 1-10**].

Those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution [**2 Tim. 3: 12**]. Even so, no matter how many may be your afflictions, you know that the Lord will deliver you out of them all [**Ps. 34: 19**]. You know that you may mourn now but that you will be comforted. You know that you will be persecuted for righteousness sake but yours is the kingdom of heaven. You know that they will persecute you now and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for Christ's sake. Yet, you are to be glad and rejoice because great is your reward in heaven [**Matt. 5: 3-12**]. So, to rejoice in Christ is an important mark of your citizenship of heaven.

d) *Never have confidence in the flesh*

Sometimes, we do not know when we stray into idolatry. Idolatry means serving a god that you can carry, not the One who can carry you. For example, when the children of Israel were attacked by fiery serpents on their way from Egypt, God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. Whoever was bitten and looked at the bronze serpent would live [**Num. 21: 4-9**]. As Jesus would explain to Nicodemus later, that bronze snake was a figure of Christ on the cross [**Jn 3: 14-15**]. But the descendants of those people began to burn incense to the bronze serpent and even called it Nehushtan, a god! It was only during the reign of King Hezekiah that the bronze serpent was destroyed [**2 Kgs 18: 4**].

The lesson we should take out of that story is the need to worship and reverence Christ, not the crucifix or the cross. Silver and gold, power and faked piety are all forms of idolatry. It is like having confidence in the flesh instead of in Christ Jesus for, without Him, we can do nothing [**Jn 15: 5**]. Therefore, as heaven's citizen, you now realise that, though you walk in the flesh, you do not war according to the flesh. The weapons of your warfare can no longer be carnal but mighty in God [**2 Cor. 10: 3-4**].

From the foregoing, we have a good understanding of why we should remain in Spirit as a matter of routine for the rest of our lives on earth. If you think that is impossible, let us learn a few lessons from Paul's own experience.

2. Lessons for believers from Paul's own experience

Paul also gave us a good case study of his personal experience from the Letter to the Philippians under consideration. For example:

a) *He gave up all confidence in the flesh*

If anyone were to have confidence in the flesh, Paul would be "more so" than anyone else. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee with a high zeal for persecuting the church [**Phil. 3: 4-6**]. He was a Roman citizen [**Acts 16: 37**] who studied law under Gamaliel [**Acts 22: 3**]. Yet, he counted all that nothing but self-righteousness. Instead, he chose righteousness from God through faith in Christ Jesus [**Phil. 3: 3-9**]. So should you.

b) *He pressed toward the heavenly goal*

His desire was now for a fellowship in the resurrection power provided for believers by Christ Himself. His desire was to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He did not bother to measure his performance because it was not in his place to do so. Instead, he forgot things behind and reached forward to those things that were ahead. In his own words, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" [**vv. 10-14**].

With such a singular focus on his ultimate destination, nothing mattered any longer. He even boasted, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" [**Phil. 4: 13**]. So should you.

c) *He lived here like a citizen of heaven*

There was no room for Paul to compromise. He told the Philippians, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern ... for our citizenship is in heaven, from which

we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” [Phil. 3: 17-18, 21]. How about you?

It looks so simple and straight forward! According to an African proverb, you do not look for a mat until you know where you will sleep. We want to spend eternity in heaven. *So, we know the “sleeping mat” to get. It cannot be made of flesh. It must be made in the Spirit of God, which the atoning blood of Jesus has already procured for us. All it now takes is for us to apply for heaven’s passport (by being born again of water and of the Holy Spirit) and keep it valid (by remaining in the kingdom of God for the rest of our lives on earth). So, at our death, heaven will welcome home its citizens, not illegal aliens or citizens of other countries! That is Paul’s message in today’s study.*

3. Conclusion: Lay up your treasures in heaven!

In one of his popular songs, late Jim Reeves says, “This world is not my home; I’m just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue...If heaven’s not my home, then Lord what will I do?”² In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His listeners, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be*” [Matt. 6: 19-21]. Jim Reeves knew that his treasures were in heaven. He looked forward to going there!

Do you see heaven as your home, your country? If yes, put your heart there. Give up your worldly passport of greed and evil deeds. Give up self-delusion and inordinate pursuit of earthly possessions that you cannot take to the next world. Instead, *obtain and retain your heavenly passport that Jesus has already paid for with His blood shed for you on Mount Calvary.*

There are no dual citizens in heaven.

² <http://www.songlyrics/jim-reeves/this-world-is-not-my-home-lyrics/>