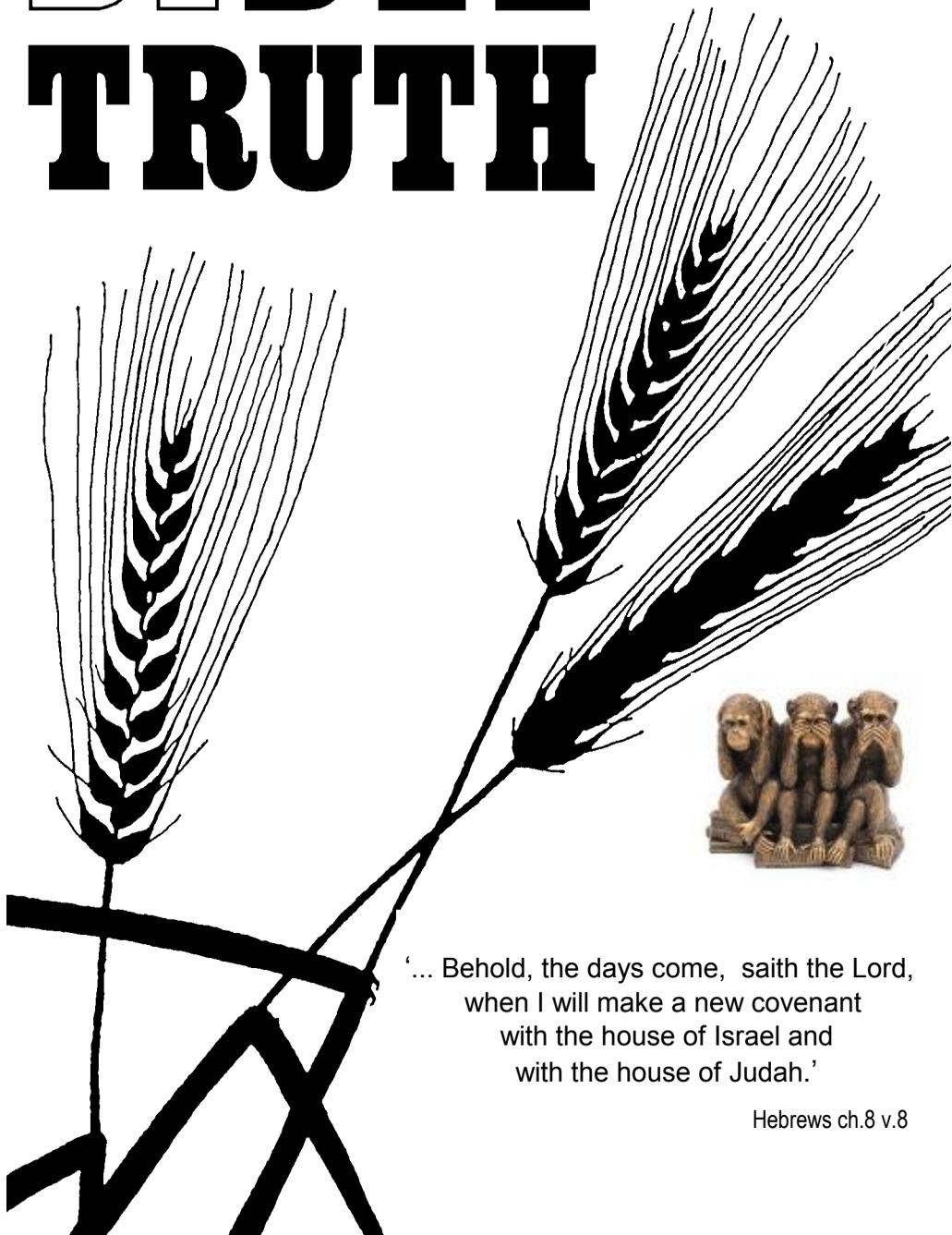


BIBLE TRUTH

No. 293
January/March
2019



‘... Behold, the days come, saith the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel and
with the house of Judah.’

Hebrews ch.8 v.8

HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

by the late Pastor John H. Hilker

As the Gospel of the Kingdom continues to be preached and taught, it is good to be sure not to miss out on any of the good news contained in the Word. One aspect of the good news which I want to share with you concerns our heavenly citizenship. What does this citizenship imply and what emphasis is placed upon it in the Scriptures?

The believer has a dual citizenship. He is a citizen of the nation in which he resides and, at the same time, he is enrolled as a citizen in heaven.

An examination of the life and writings of the Apostle Paul clearly shows the importance of these dual citizenship roles and the proper place of each. Paul was a freeborn Roman citizen, entitled to all the rights and privileges accorded to him by the State. At the same time, Paul's hope, possessions, inheritance and Head are in heaven.

Paul had many interesting and exciting experiences during his earthly walk, especially after his conversion. As we recall some of these experiences, please notice that there was nothing within the scope of Paul's behaviour which called for disobedience to the civil law or civil authorities. It was not due to his Roman citizenship that Paul got into trouble; but his troubles came as a result of his preaching and teaching the cross of Christ and the resurrection. Taking this position will get us into trouble too; but if we stay firm on this foundation and make it a part of our testimony our heritage and our witness, we can rest assured that we are in company with the Apostle Paul and with the Christ Himself.

An incident recorded in the Book of Acts ch.16 occurred when the jail in which Paul and Silas were held prisoners was shaken by an earthquake.

'And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast

us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.'

vv 35-39

Paul said that he stood uncondemned as a Roman citizen; he was not accused of performing acts which were contrary to Roman law. This should help us to see that we must keep straight the difference between our patriotism and our religion. We are on dangerous ground if we make a religion out of patriotism. Certainly we may be thankful that we live where we do and that we are citizens of a great nation which God has blessed above others. On the other hand, we must remember constantly that, as disciples of Christ, we are walking in a higher order. We should not expect to receive justice from a worldly order. Christ told us that we should expect persecutions and revilings; but that we were to be 'harmless as doves'.

Another incident in the Apostle Paul's life is recorded in Acts ch.22. The chief captain had commanded that Paul be brought into the castle to be examined by scourging.

'And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?'

v.25

On hearing Paul's words the centurion took notice and told the chief captain. This man indicated that he had paid a great price for his freedom, to which Paul replied, '... But I was free born'. This made the captain afraid, for he had bound a Roman citizen.

'And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.'

Acts ch.23 v.1

In effect, Paul was saying that ever since his conversion, he had been an honest, God-fearing man, a member of the commonwealth of Israel, whose hope, of course, is in Christ. So while we are members of the commonwealth of Israel, and though we are called as born-again believers, we have our citizenship in heaven.

As Paul was in the midst of these troubles, he was being pushed around from city to city and his very life was in danger, note the comfort given him in v.11 of the same chapter.

‘And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.’

Paul was to ‘bear witness’ unto the Lord at Rome, also. Being witnesses unto Him seals our discipleship, our apostleship and our citizenship, it is our purpose for being here. What does this ‘bearing witness’ to Christ imply?

Oswald Chambers, in his devotional book *My Utmost For His Highest*, refers to the Lord’s words to His disciples in Acts ch.1 v.8. Namely, ‘... ye shall be witnesses unto me’. Regarding this statement, Chambers comments as follows,

‘Not witnesses to what Jesus can do – that is an elementary witness – but “witnesses unto **me**”. We will take everything that happens as happening to Him, whether it be praise, blame, persecution or commendation. No one can stand like that for Jesus Christ who is not constrained by the majesty of His personal power’.

That is where Paul stood. As a citizen of the heavenly kingdom, standing upon the finished work of Christ, Paul was neither a weirdo nor a fanatic. Paul was as sane and stable as anyone; he did not have to exhibit fanatical behaviour or to rebel and to revolt against the civil government to prove that he was a Christian. Nor do we! All we need to do is to stand by the resurrection, the power of God and to the fact that we are saved by the grace and love of God. Many people may frown on this because it leaves little for us to do. But when we stand at Christ’s finished work, we are being ‘witnesses unto Him’.

At Acts ch.24 vv 12-16, Paul defending himself, simply said,

‘... they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city.’

Paul neither went around stirring up everybody to try to get his point across nor to secure a following and take over the government.

‘Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And

herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.'

Paul was a citizen of a heavenly kingdom. He knew where he stood; and he believed everything written in the law and in the prophets. Believing what is written in the Book is enough to get us into trouble from fellow citizens today also. Christ Himself, in one of His kingdom parables spoke of the 'citizens' who hated Him. This is why the cleansing of the Kingdom will be necessary before the coming of the King.

Paul gave a further testimony.

'Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.'

Acts ch.26 vv 19-23

Festus shouted that Paul was mad; but there he took his stand. The Christian should be a good citizen; but he also knows that he has an eternal inheritance, that he has been enrolled in heaven. And our heavenly citizenship should take priority over our earthly citizenship.

Jesus told the disciples that they were not to rejoice merely over successful service; yet for many, that is where most of the rejoicing comes. The disciples were not to rejoice over the fact that they had been given special power. In Luke ch.10 the return of the seventy whom Christ had sent out is relayed.

'And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.'

vv 17-20

When these disciples came back, they were filled with wonder and amazement at the wonderful power they had been given. But Christ said that they should rather rejoice because 'your names are written in heaven'. They had heavenly citizenship, and the approval of God.

Moses at one time stepped into the breach on behalf of the Israel people after they had sinned against the Lord; and one of the things he said to the Lord was,

'Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin ... ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written'. Exodus ch.32 v.32

Moses was more concerned that the names of the children of Israel were written on the pages of heaven than that he should remain in his position and take them on into the Promised Land.

Certainly the Lord blesses us in this life giving us a beautiful land with houses and goods far beyond what we could dream or imagine. Take note, however, of these words.

'But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.'

Hebrews ch.12 vv 22-24

We are part of the firstborn, which are written in heaven; we have a heavenly citizenship. How did we obtain it? Simply by faith in the finished work of Christ. We must stand on the guarantee of the written Word of God that these things are true, regardless of how 'unheavenly' we might feel at times. Our feelings from within have nothing to do with the historical reality of what Christ did; that was accomplished outside of us. It is a fact that He paid the price and gave His life to provide the assurance for our heavenly citizenship.

The Word states that Christ is seated in heaven at the right hand of God; so by faith in the Word, we are citizens now of that heavenly kingdom. We speak of it, sing about it, and rejoice in it. We long for it and pray for it. Our treasures are there; our Head, Christ, is there.

The Book of Colossians has a beautiful chapter concerning seeking things that are above.

'If ye then be risen with Christ [and we are - if we die with Him, we are risen with Him], seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'

Colossians ch.3 v.1

We cannot make this an earthly verse. Christ is at the right hand of God in the heavens; and we are told to seek those things which are above.

‘Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.’

Colossians ch.3 vv 2-4

The word ‘then’ always infers a waiting time; but we must believe now that our life is quietly hid in Christ. And if it is hid in Him, then it is His. Christ is in the heavens, and when He appears, then we will also appear with Him in glory: Then will come the revealing; then will come the graciousness and the greatness of the whole picture.

Christ is seated in the heavenly places,

‘That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.’

Ephesians ch.1 vv 17-20

The wisdom and the knowledge of Christ which the Spirit gives enables us to appropriate our heavenly citizenship. The eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we can look unto those things which are not seen as though they are; and they become a reality to us. We are dead to the world, but alive unto God.

The life that is hid in Christ in the heavens is secure. Could anything be more secure than that? Could anything give us more calm and quiet assurance than this knowledge. And where are we now? If Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and if our life is hid in Him, are we not there with Him also? If we are in Christ, we are seated in heavenly places — now!

It would be well to consider the following verse.

‘But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the

exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.'

Ephesians ch.2 vv 4-7

As the saying goes, 'You haven't seen anything yet!' Tremendous things lie ahead. A life hid with Christ in God in the heavens is untouchable by earthly things – unharmed and unmarred. Nothing can touch us or hurt us there. That is why Paul preached the way he did and that is why he took what he did. The eyes of his understanding had been enlightened to these heavenly things.

Paul was concerned very much when he learned that there were those who had lost the vision of their heavenly walk. He spoke specifically of them in the Book of Philippians where he wrote this.

'Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)'

Philippians ch.3 vv 17-19

Paul's words 'I ... tell you even weeping' coincide with the words of many who did the same thing on behalf of the Lord's people all through the Scriptures — Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Moses and David, to name a few. The same spirit gripped them; and they were, in a very real sense, the intercessors in their generations.

Paul also stated, ' many ... are the enemies of the cross of Christ'. Why? They were enemies of the cross because their minds were solely on earthly things, whereas the Cross focuses on eternal things. These are things in which the world cannot glory. Further he writes,

'For our conversation [meaning our life as citizens or as members of the commonwealth of Israel] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body [or a body of humiliation], that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself '.

Philippians ch.3 vv 20-21

Christ is Lord of heaven and of earth; He is supreme in all things. And where is He now? He is in heaven. Certainly we believe in the Kingdom of God on earth and we pray that God's will shall 'be done on earth as it is in heaven'. But we need to be reminded of where Christ is now, and of His power and of His role as intercessor for us.

Our life is hid in Him in the heavens now; and our inheritance is there now. These thoughts are tremendous! One day we will realize fully the impact of these great and wonderful truths.

Until then we must be persistent in our beliefs (not in our feelings). We must be patient in our waiting, as we long to be clothed from heaven. And we must be firm in our foundation.

Let the following heavenly thoughts help to fix your minds on things above:

- Christ Himself carried us in Him through death and destruction, brought us up from the grave, and seated us in heavenly places.
- The Word is our heavenly Book.
- The Holy Spirit is our heavenly seal.
- Prayer is our heavenly communication.
- Worship is our heavenly praise.
- Our fellowship 'in the beloved' is our heavenly strength.

All of these heavenly things (which are a part of our heritage now) transcend earthly things.

Look at the letter to the Hebrews where,

'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God'.

Hebrews ch.11 vv 8-10

Note carefully the phrase 'By faith he sojourned in the land of promise'. He was not a sojourner physically removed from the land of promise; but he was a sojourner in the Land of Promise.

A little later in Hebrews ch.11 it mentions those who had obtained a good report through faith and died in faith, not having received the promises. This is still true. We have not yet received fulfilment of all of the promises. We must recognize that we are still strangers and pilgrims. When the Lord returns and heaven descends upon us, then the glory that we have in Him shall be revealed fully.
