

Heavenly Citizenship (Part 1)

Martin G. Collins

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Let me begin with a significant question regarding your heavenly citizenship: "Do you have a birth certificate? Or, are you living on a passport?"

Now, the mention of a birth certificate automatically brings to mind the President of the United States. I apologize, in one sense, for getting into a little bit of politics here at the beginning by way of an introduction. President Obama has been up to his eyeballs in corruption; there is not an area of life that he has not had some major negative impact on our lives. From his deceitful communitarian campaign on "change," to his refusal to release public and private records regarding his past. At the heart of his sham is his birth certificate deception and cover-up.

The controversy stems from the United States Constitution, Article 2, Section 1, which states, "No person except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the office of President."

A number of challenges and lawsuits have been based on the constitutional requirement; some alleging Obama does not qualify because he was not born in Hawaii in 1961 as he claims. Others say he fails to qualify because he was a dual citizen of the United States and the United Kingdom when he was born, and the framers of the Constitution specifically excluded dual citizens from eligibility.

Complicating the issue is the fact that besides Obama's actual birth documentation, he has concealed documentation including his, kindergarten records, Occidental College records, Columbia University records, Columbia thesis, Harvard Law School records, Harvard Law Review articles, scholarly articles from the University of Chicago, passports, medical records, files from his years as an Illinois state senator, Illinois State Bar Association records, baptism records, and his adoption records.

He has had multiple Social Security numbers and passports, under multiple aliases. Who is this man, and to what is he really loyal? We do not even know what passport he is traveling under.

There have been dozens of lawsuits raised over Obama's birth and eligibility. He reported in his book that he was born in Hawaii and his half-sister agrees.

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But the woman the president says is his paternal grandmother, Sarah Obama, claimed to have been present at her grandson's birth in Mombasa, Kenya.

Complicating the issue are: Obama's move to Indonesia as a child, where he reportedly attended that nation's public schools, and his later travels to Pakistan, raising questions about on what nation's passport that travel was accomplished.

Then there are the multiple law firms hired to make certain Obama's long-form birth certificate information, and other documentation such as college records, remain sealed from public view.

Obama's presidential campaign released to select news organizations only what is known as a "certification of live birth," a document obtainable in Hawaii in 1961 by Americans actually born outside the country.

The United States Constitution requires a president to be a "natural born citizen," and, while the term is not defined in the Constitution, many legal analysts believe at the time it was written it meant a person in the United States of two United States citizen parents. I am not eligible to be President, thankfully. My mother is a British citizen and my father was an American G.I. in the air force. I was born in England, so I came over here on a semi-birth certificate of the United States. It was one issued to military children of parents like that. But I do have an American passport, and I am an American citizen, and the American birth certificate is my birth certificate here, but I also have an English birth certificate. But very clearly I am not eligible to be President of the United States. I hear a big sigh of relief from most of you.

Critics say Obama clearly does not qualify under that definition, since he has admitted in his book his father was never a U.S. citizen. Some legal challenges have argued he was not even born in Hawaii. Welcome to political 'change,' or corrupt change I should say!

Proverbs 24:21-22 My son, fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two [i.e. the Lord and the king] can bring?

So, of course, as citizens of heaven we leave the judgment to our just God.

Does Obama have a birth certificate? Or, is he living on a passport? Either way, he is a stranger and a foreigner.

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Do you have a birth certificate? Or, are you living on a passport? How do you perceive yourself? What is your perspective?

What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?

There is a change that must take place in us before we can become citizens of heaven. There is no greater change known to man in any realm than the change that we all undergo when we become sons of the kingdom of heaven. It is a new creation no less.

The apostle Paul confirms that our citizenship is in heaven, if we are indeed Christians.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, 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.

Also, there comes to light the privilege of our position as Christians and as members of God's church, as members of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The first is the picture of a state—Christians are fellow citizens in a great kingdom, a great state.

The second is that Christians are members together of a family, that is, the household of God.

The third is that individual members, and the church as a whole, are a temple where God Himself dwells.

That is the great theme here—the privilege of being a citizen of heaven.

In Ephesians 1, Paul said that he had been praying for the Ephesian members of the

church, asking that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened so that they may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Ephesians 1:15-21 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

That is what Paul wants us to see—the privilege of being a Christian, of being a citizen of heaven.

If we truly realized exactly what we are, and who we are as Christians, many of the problems in our daily life and living would automatically improve and even be solved. Often it is because we do not realize the full extent of our privileged position that the problems arise. Because we do not uphold the standards required of citizens of heaven.

If we did, we would not envy people who are not Christians, we would never try to live as near to their way of life as possible; and sometimes almost feel sorry because we are not in their situation. We do not have the money that they do, we do not have the boat that they have, or whatever the case may be. All that is due to a failure to realize what we are as citizens of heaven, and the privileges that come along with it. Paul describes this negatively, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners."

So, Paul refers to this in chapter 2, where he says,

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of

promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

So being citizens of heaven we have hope all of the time, every day, twenty four hours a day, and we are with God as we live in this world.

Paul says that we are no longer strangers and foreigners, because it is no use our going on to consider the privileges unless we are perfectly certain that we are citizens of heaven. It is no use being told exactly what applies to a certain position if you are not in that position.

Before I begin to look at my citizenship, or my membership of that family, or myself as a stone in that building, in that temple, I must ask myself, "Do I have a birth certificate? Or, am I living on a passport?"

In the case of the Ephesians, there was no doubt or question whatsoever about this matter. Paul says, "Now, therefore, you are no longer that, but you are this." These people, when pagans, had lived a certain type of life—a spiritually inferior type of life. The Jews, on the other hand, had lived a different type of life, and followed a very different pattern of worship.

Now, no one could turn from paganism to Christianity, and be in the Christian faith with converted Jews, without having undergone a very great change. He had to leave behind certain practices and customs; he had to renounce certain gods whom he had worshipped before, and many other things in that Gentile world.

Hardest of all, he had to admit and confess that he had been totally wrong and sinful. It was an obvious change!

Paul said, "You are no longer that, you are now this." This is something that is always true in what we may call first generation Christians. But it is not so simple when you come to the second generation Christians; and still more difficult when you come to third and fourth generation Christians. They have a hard time comparing the life that they have had with the life that they are going to live as baptized members of God's church.

So, that the change was perfectly plain in the case of these previously pagan Ephesians. It is not always quite so plain now. It is never as easy and as simple in a country where many assume their country is primarily Christian. So we see mainstream Christianity believing that they are true Christians, and believing that this nation is a true Christian nation, when it is anything but.

It is important, then, that we interpret this not only in the setting in which it was originally written, but also in our own particular setting; because, as I will try to show, the principle is always exactly the same; it is the application that differs somewhat.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:19, is primarily concerned about the principle of life. He has been doing that all along in this highly spiritual paragraph. It was obvious that the Ephesian Christians had once been unbelievers, but that they were now believers.

The two words used by Paul in Ephesians 2:19 help us to realize our position with regard to the world. The first word is the word 'stranger.'

Ephesians 2:19a Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers.

What is a stranger? Strangers are those who find themselves among a people not their own.

When you are a stranger, you are among people who are not your own people. They all belong to one another, but you are a stranger, you do not belong to them, they are not your own people.

The second word is the word translated both in the King James, and New King James Version as 'foreigners.'

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners.

Sometimes you will find it translated 'sojourners.' Both terms are good translations. What does this word mean? Originally, it was a description of someone who dwelt near a community but not in it; for example, a man who lives just outside the city limits. He is near the city but he is not in it; he does not belong to the city.

That was the original meaning, but now it has come to mean those who find themselves in a place that is not their own country.

The first term, 'stranger,' conjures up more the idea of the family unit, of a kind of blood relationship, whereas this other words, 'foreigner,' or 'sojourner,' compels us inevitably to think more in terms of a state, a country, or a kingdom.

A 'foreigner' is a man who finds himself in a place that is not his own country. It means

that though this man is living in the country he does not possess the citizenship of that country. He is not naturalized, and he does not have the right of permanent residence in that country. Or, to put it still more simply, he is a man who is living on a passport.

Now these are the two words that the apostle Paul uses: strangers and foreigners. People maybe living there for a long time, but still they are always sojourners, they are still aliens. The other place is their home; they are living here on a passport and they have to renew it periodically.

Now that is the picture that Paul sets before us. And you notice that when he comes to the positive in Ephesians 2:19, he just reverses this: He starts with the citizenship, and then he goes on to the family relationship. Verse 19, "But you are 'fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.'"

But for the moment, we are concerned primarily with the negative, 'You are no longer strangers and foreigners.'

Notice what a subtle matter this is. We have all often seen it in practice. There may be someone living in the family, someone who has lived in the family for years, and is almost one of the family, and yet not one of the family. Though this person may be sharing in the life of the family in almost every conceivable manner, still he or she actually does not belong to the family. And that is where the difficulty comes in.

An outsider upon observing this person for a short while might say, 'This person is obviously one of the family.' And yet, having known them for a while he would discover that that was not the case. It is exactly the same with a country.

There may be people living in a country, resident for many years, and somebody coming on a visit to the country, looking at them would take it for granted that any one of them was actually one of that country, just a typical citizen. They are doing the same thing as the others, going to work in the morning, returning home at night, following exactly the same routine. And yet actually that person does not belong to that country, he is not a citizen, but is just living on a passport or a visa.

There we see in a picture the idea we have to grasp with our minds. That is the sort of thing that God's church deals with, with regard to the world—of living with a family but not belonging to it, being in a country and yet not being a citizen. Christians are not citizens of the world, and neither can be.

It is possible to be in a company and yet not be of the company. You remember that

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when the children of Israel went up from Egypt to Canaan, we are told, in a very interesting phrase, that a mixed multitude went up with them.

They went with them, they shared the same hazards, the same problems and difficulties as the children of Israel, but they did not belong to them. They were a mixed multitude. But the apostle Paul takes it still further in Romans 9.

Romans 9:6-8 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

What a phrase we have here! You look at them as a mass and you say, 'They are all of Israel.' But that does not follow of necessity. There is a physical Israel and a spiritual Israel. There is an Israel of the spirit, as well as an Israel of the flesh. There is a remnant in the mass.

You can be of a company and yet really not belong to it. The apostle John says the same thing about certain people who had gone out of the early church.

I John 2:18-19 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

So there were people in the congregation there that were travelling on a spiritual passport, and they did not have their birth certificate of the Kingdom of heaven.

They had been among them, but they were not of them. They had been in the church, and they seemed to be Christian, but they had never really belonged. That is the type of principle that is raised here for us.

Let us consider it by putting it in the form of a number of basic principles.

The first principle is that the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is clear and definite.

In spite of all that I have been saying, the principle remains that there is a clear distinction between a Christian and a non-Christian. Paul puts it like this: 'You are...no more.' There is a change—a changeover. 'You are no longer strangers and foreigners.'

Obviously, there has been a change externally, but we are not concerned as much about the external, but about the internal. And so, there does not need to be any hesitation in asserting that every one of us at this moment is either a Christian, or else is not a Christian.

We are either 'in Christ,' or else we are 'outside Christ.' Jesus emphasizes this point in Matthew 7. You cannot be on the narrow way and the broad way at the same time.

What we are doing today is going through some basic principles that apply to the citizenship in heaven.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

You cannot be going through two gates at the same time. You cannot be passing through a turnstile and going through a wide gate at the same time, it is impossible. Now that is the thing that starts off the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.

The Christian goes in at the straight gate; he walks on the narrow way. The other does the exact opposite. It has to be one thing or the other. Christ goes on repeating this principle—true prophet, false prophet; good tree, bad tree; good fruit, bad fruit; and finally in that vivid picture of the house on the rock and the house on the sand.

It is always one or the other; it is either / or. You are Christian or you are not Christian. And these things are absolutes. 'You are no longer strangers and foreigners'—you are Christians, in the body of Christ. Of course, I am speaking to the wheat, and not to the tares.

The Christian position is not a vague one, it is not indefinite, it is not uncertain. Of course, if you think of it mainly in terms of superficial conduct and behavior, then it may very well be vague. I can easily draw a picture and show you two men.

One is a man who is highly moral, never does anybody any harm, his word is his bond, he is honest and just and upright, a thoroughly good man in every sense of the word by the world's standards.

But now look at the other man. You cannot say, looking at them generally, that the second man is as good as the first man. He sometimes does things that he should not, and maybe he is not as lovable or likeable, and maybe he has a personality clash with people. And yet it may be the case that the second man is a Christian and the first man is not. What determines whether a man is a Christian or not, is not his general appearance and surface behavior. Many people, even in the church, have a hard time distinguishing between God's church and Protestantism, and some of the more conservative sects like Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists. But there is a huge difference between us. We cannot just look at the surface of things and say, "Well, they are good people," there is much more to it than that.

It is the good fruit and true witness from the heart and spirit that he produces in his life in service to God and others that shows that he is a Christian. That foreigner living in this land looks like any other American, he does the same things, and so on; but the fact is that he is still a foreigner.

The fact that he looks like the other man does not mean that he is like him. The question is, is he living on a passport or has he a citizenship? You see, the test is not just the general, superficial appearance. This is the very thing the New Testament is always emphasizing.

We are definitely either a Christian, or we are not. There is no such thing as an intermediate position where one is hoping to be, or trying to be a Christian. If you are simply hoping or half-heartedly trying to be a Christian it may very well be that you are not one. Only God can discern the heart though and know who is who.

I Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

To be on the doorstep is not to be inside. Christ paints the picture of people coming and hammering at the door and saying, 'Please open the door;' but the reply comes from the inside, 'No!' You are outside; you do not belong. We are either Christian, or we are not Christian, and that is a very scary thought, and a very serious thing to contemplate.

So, the second principle is to stress the vital importance of knowing which we are.

Here again Paul's illustration helps us. How does it become clear and obvious whether we are strangers and foreigners (i.e. sojourners), or whether we really belong?

Eventually, it always becomes clear. It does not matter how intimate a relationship may be, however friendly you may be with someone who is living with you in the family. There is a saying that puts it all in a nutshell, 'After all, blood is thicker than water.'

Certain points arise in life when actually the one thing that matters is the blood relationship. And it is at that point that the poor stranger begins to feel that he is only a stranger after all. He may have felt for years that the distinctions were irrelevant and may have said, 'I am one of them; I am a member of the family and have always been treated as a member of the family.'

But suddenly, in a crisis, he discovers that he is not. 'Blood is thicker than water.' We cannot fully explain these things; we may even say that there is a great deal that is wrong about such a situation. That may well be, but that is how it works out in practice.

Something fundamental, elemental, suddenly comes to the surface; and we find a whole family that may have been at odds suddenly becoming one. And the poor stranger is conscious that he is now an outsider.

Or take another illustration that may put it still more clearly. Take a person who is a sojourner, a foreigner, in another land. He may have lived there twenty, thirty or forty years, and enjoyed living there, liked by all and happy. All distinctions seem irrelevant.

Suddenly and unexpectedly the country to which that man belongs and this country in which he is living have a dispute; and the dispute cannot be settled, and war is declared. And this man who may have lived in the country for forty years suddenly realizes that he is a foreigner, and that everybody looks at him with suspicion.

It has already happened in this country in a big way. You remember about the Japanese internment camps of World War II. I am sure that those people who were citizens of the United States felt immediately like foreigners. He may be interned, or sent back to his own country. He appeared to be a member of the country previously. Sometimes, it is almost tragic, but it has happened, and will happen again.

We turn again, then, to the principle that we find running right through the scriptures. Why is it important to know whether you are a Christian or not? Because it is at the time

of testing that this thing becomes of vital importance to know. It is in the tests and trials of life that this thing comes out.

As Christians are persecuted more and more, and the laws are changed to do more harm to Christians, some of us in this room may end up having to face a judge, or having to face prison, where we are persecuted for our religious beliefs. It is going to be at times like that that we are going to have to really know whether we are travelling on a passport or birth certificate. We really need to work these things through in our minds early before that happens.

You go on for years while you are well and vigorous. You are in the church; and you seem to be of the church; your interest is there, and you are one with the congregation. But suddenly you become ill and you find yourself sick in bed for months.

It will not be long before you know whether you are a Christian or not. It makes a crucial difference then, under the stress of a trial, or a sickness or anything of that sort. Or when there is an illness in a member of the family, when there is a deep empathy or a death, some terrible heart-rending sorrow.

It is during times like this that we realize how essentially important it is to know whether we are a Christian or not.

If you are simply 'living on a passport,' it does not seem to help you. But if you really belong, it makes all the difference in the world. But let us take it to the ultimate.

Jesus Christ Himself does this, and it is the major point in the concluding section of Matthew 7. There are people who seem to be Christian and who say, 'Lord, have we not done many wonderful works in your name?'

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

He is a stranger after all, a foreigner in the last analysis; passport handed back, shipped abroad, sent out of the country! So you see that it is vitally important that we are absolutely certain whether we are still 'strangers and foreigners,' or whether we really

belong.

To be practical, here is the third principle as a question. How can we know, for sure, that we are a citizen? What are the tests? Here are some very simple answers based on the illustration used by the apostle Paul.

I will start first with the most superficial thing of all. Here is the general idea. This is so you can test yourselves.

If you want to know if you are a stranger and a foreigner or not, answer this question:

Do you feel at ease in the church?

Are you quite at ease among brethren in the church?

Do you feel at home?

Or, do you have an uncomfortable feeling that you are somehow an outsider?

This is what happens when you go to stay with a family, is it not? They may be very nice and friendly, but you feel that you do not belong, you are not quite at ease, you are conscious of the fact that you are not in your own home, you cannot relax. They may love you as one of the family, and you may love them just as well, but there is always just that little difference there.

And in the spiritual realm it becomes a huge difference. You are a stranger, after all, though it is all very kind and pleasant and friendly.

Are you at home among God's people? Or, do you feel like you do not really fit in?

Let me clarify this question with another question: Are you as much at ease among God's people as you are in other social groups and in other types of groups outside the church?

We all know the principle, to have friends you must show yourself friendly. So, we do have to do our part and work hard at being an active citizen of heaven.

With the other types of groups—the laughter and joking, the fun and perhaps the drinking, are you free and open with them, and do you have a lot to say? Are you one of them? Are you conscious of being a bit out of your element in the church?

This is tremendously important to us. When you put it in terms of a family you see how inevitable it is; we just know it is true—it one of those gut feeling things.

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So the way that we are filled with all the fullness of God is to actively make use of the Holy Spirit that is given to us, by being a true and good witness, and a good example in submitting to God, obeying Him and overcoming our sins.

Our physical bodies need to be strengthened every day. Similarly, our hearts and minds need constant supplies of God's Spirit. Dedication needs to be constantly invigorated, or it withers and decays. Every Christian needs spiritual help given each day to enable him to bear trials, to resist temptation, to carry out his duty, to live a life of faith. God's Spirit helps us to be zealous in these areas, and it does much, much more.

Is your interest in God's way of life, in the church, in the brethren, real and full of life?

When you belong to a family you are active and alive in your interest. More than that, you really enjoy it, your heart is fully in it, it is what you love, and it is where you like to be. You like to be at home, you like to be in your own country; and you should like to be in God's church because it is your spiritual home.

With respect to our relationship to the church, a person who truly belongs is happy in it. It is not a matter of effort to him. It is not a mere matter of duty. It is something he enjoys himself and that he values above everything else.

Let me summarize this whole section with the words of King David:

Psalms 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

We feel that we belong to them and are unified with them, because they are brethren.

Now we come to a second test, and that is understanding.

When you are staying with a family, this question of understanding becomes tremendously important; and it is the same when you are a foreigner in another country.

Think about this: Do you know and understand what is being talked about in every case, when you are staying with another family? Is there anything that makes you feel more uncomfortable than to have the feeling that, though you are seated with the family, somehow or another you are outside the conversation and do not enter into what they are talking about?

They all seem to understand one another, they use certain phrases, they look at one another in a significant way, they are all in it, but you are somehow not in it. You are listening, you are part of the group, and you are not able to enter into it and to enjoy it.

Let me ask you this: Do you understand the language of God's people? The family has its own language. There have been some who have said under their breath, 'I cannot stand this talk about justification, sanctification and all these terms.' Do you feel like that ever?

They are precious terms to the children of God. Impatience with biblical terminology may show that you are an outsider and you do not understand the language. Granted, it takes a long time to learn a new language; but have you made sufficient effort?

But, it is not only a question of language, there is something more. Do you know anything about the subjects that they are discussing?

Again, let me use an illustration. We have all had this kind of experience. Maybe we are staying with a family. They are all so nice and kind and pleasant, and we are engaged in conversation. Then, suddenly, somebody comes in, and you can tell by looking at his face that something has happened that is of great concern to the family.

And they all feel awkward, they want to talk about this together; but you are there and they cannot. So they talk in hints and suggestions and in an indirect round-about way. You do not know what they are talking about. They behave like that because you are a stranger—they like you, they are not insulting you, but you do not understand.

There are these intimate problems and questions that they cannot share with you,

though they like you very much, because you do not belong to the family. It is the same with a country. And it is like that in the Christian life.

Are the questions and the subjects and the problems of the Christian life known to you? Are you interested in them? Or when you sit and listen to people talking about them, or perhaps as you listen to someone trying to preach, do you say to yourself, "What is all this about? I do not understand it."

The outsider would say, 'Now if they were talking about sports or cars, cooking or fashion, of course, I would understand; but these other things—what is it all about? It is so boring.'

That is a way of discovering whether you are of the church family or not.

Let us look at it in a way that may be one of the ultimate tests. Are you in on the secrets? There are family secrets, there are national secrets. It is possible for a person to be interested in religion, to be interested in theology, to be interested in philosophy; and as long as you are dealing with abstract theoretical questions he appears to be right in on it and one of the family. You have met this kind of person before—he is a kind of religious hobbyist. He can talk the talk, speak the biblical language, and yet he is just doing it as a hobby.

But then you begin to talk about spiritual things and immediately the person who has been so interested theoretically feels he is an outsider. It is possible to have a general interest, but not this intimate, personal interest in the secrets—the mystery—of the Christian life.

Several scriptures mention this same thing:

Romans 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began.

Only converted members of God's church have had the mystery revealed to them. Of all the billions of people who have been on earth, only a handful—a remnant—have had this revelation.

I Corinthians 2:7-8 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which

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none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Ephesians 1:9 Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself.

Colossians 1:26 The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

So the mystery kept secret has only been revealed to God's saints. Are you in on the secrets? Do you understand the mystery?

Let me give you some other tests. Are you conforming in general to the laws and the customs of the country—God's kingdom?

The apostle John says God's commands are not heavy or oppressive.

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

They are oppressive to everyone else, but not to the Christian. David said, 'O, how I love Your law!'

We proclaim where we are and what we are, by the way that we live. You go from this country, say, to the United Kingdom, South Africa, or Trinidad, and continue to drive your car on the right side of the road as we do here, in a matter of a few seconds you will know you are a foreigner.

Are there any people driving on the wrong side of the road within the church? They may not know it, but they are proclaiming that they are foreigners and strangers by spiritually driving on the wrong side of the road. They do not know and honor the laws and the commandments of the kingdom.

They are not behaving in a manner that is consistent with the customs and the habits of this particular family and country. They are strangers and foreigners, though living in the family or country.

Another test is concern for the state and condition of the family or country, and its well-being. This arises instinctively.

It comes to this: I have started on the superficial level and have gone down deeper. Here is the last proof I will give you today. Which do you have, a passport or a birth certificate?

That is absolute proof, is it not? That is beyond feeling, interest, understanding and all these things. In the last analysis it is a legal question.

Do you have a birth certificate or are you simply living on a passport?

What is the Christian's birth certificate? It is above and beyond everything else I have been saying.

Romans 8:14-17 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

It is the assurance that can only be given by God through the Holy Spirit. You may be a true Christian though you have no definite knowledge of the sealing of the Spirit; it is not something you feel. It is something that you know; it is something that you understand. It requires belief, it requires faith.

Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...

Hopefully, you have passed these tests. But please do not be content with just passing these tests. Insist on hanging on to your birth certificate! Do not settle for being a stranger and a foreigner. Constantly remind yourself, "I am a fellow citizen with the saints, I am of the household of God, and I am an ambassador for Christ." These are things that we should tell ourselves on a regular basis, but not without supporting it with our righteous actions, with our obedience and our overcoming, and with our going through suffering and realizing that it is a joy because spiritual blessings come from it.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

In these words, the apostle Paul puts before us the glories and privileges and advantages of membership in the church. He tells us in the first chapter of this epistle, that this is only possible as long as 'the eyes of our understanding are enlightened.' It is impossible apart from that.

The church is nothing but an institution to people whose eyes are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. They may like the members and enjoy being in it as an institution or even a social club, but that is not what Paul wants us to see.

He prays that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened that we may know, "What is the hope of our calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe," as Ephesians 1:18 tells us.

Paul stresses the vital importance of our being absolutely certain that we are in the position described in this verse. We cannot hope to realize the privileges of this position unless we know what the position is, and unless we are quite sure that we are in it.

We have seen the importance of knowing for certain that we are no longer strangers and foreigners, of knowing that we no longer live on a passport, but that we really have our birth certificates, and that we really do belong.

All the epistles are written to the members of Christian churches, and what every one of them does is: They all start by giving us a picture of our position as members of God's church, and then, having done that, they say, 'In light of that, this is obviously how you have to live.' They leave no doubt.

Most of our trials, troubles, tribulations and problems would be viewed in an entirely different manner if we really saw ourselves as we are in Christ.

Do you have a birth certificate? Or, are you living on a passport?