

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## THE PRIVILEGES OF CITIZENSHIP

by Lee Moses

Citizenship has its privileges. This is especially true regarding citizenship in a powerful nation such as ancient Rome or the modern-day United States. The privileges of citizenship are a hot topic in the press currently, as debates rage over whether certain individuals should be granted citizenship without following the legal course to citizenship, and whether other individuals should be granted certain privileges of citizenship without their being citizens.

Certainly the privileges of citizenship are desirable, and nowhere more so than in the kingdom of God—His church. And this is where Christians have their true citizenship. The members of the church of Christ at Ephesus were called “*fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*” (Ephesians 2:19). The apostle Paul rejoiced with the church at Philippi, “*For our conversation (‘citizenship,’ American Standard Version) is in heaven*” (Philippians 3:20). What are some of the privileges held by the citizen of the kingdom of God?

### The Privilege of Petition

A freedom granted to all citizens by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is the freedom “to petition the government for a

redress of grievances.” If a citizen sees something not to his liking, he has the privilege to petition those in power that something might be done to remedy the situation. When the apostle Paul saw that he was not going to receive a fair trial from the governor of Judea, as a Roman citizen he was able to say, “*I appeal unto Caesar*” (Acts 25:11).

Christians have the privilege of petitioning the One with all power when anything is not to their liking. If one prays in the authorized manner, he can be assured that a ready and concerned **Father** will gladly receive his petitions: “*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:6-7). And it is truly a **mighty** hand in which the Christian trusts: “*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (James 5:16, emphasis LM). When a Christian prays, he knows that his petition will be answered in the best way possible.

But the great privilege of petition only belongs to citizens. In quoting from the Psalms, Peter by inspiration wrote, “*For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil*” (1 Peter 3:12).

### The Privilege of Protection

Citizens are afforded various protections by their governments. Laws are enacted and enforced to protect the innocent from those who would harm them. Even when traveling in foreign countries, citizens can look to their embassy for protection. If the magistrates in the city of Philippi had known that Paul was a Roman citizen, they would not have scourged and imprisoned him without a trial (Acts 16:22-24, 35-39), just as Paul’s Roman citizenship saved him from scourging on another occasion (22:24-29).

However, Paul’s greatest protection came not from his Roman citizenship, but from his heavenly citizenship. The Lord encouraged Paul while he was in Corinth, saying,

*Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And [Paul] continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (18:9-11, emphasis LM).*

Although the age of the “ambassadors for Christ,” the apostles, is more than 1900 years past, Christians continue to carry a sort of “diplomatic immunity.” The apostle Peter wrote, “*And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*” (1 Pet. 3:13). The Hebrew

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*continued from page 1*

Christians were reminded, “. . . [God] hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5-6). The heavenly citizen’s protection exceeds that of any earthly citizenship; not only because His Protector’s reign extends over all nations (Psalm 47:8), but also because his protection extends beyond this life. As the Spirit tells the churches, “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Revelation 2:11).

**The Privilege of Participation**

When a person becomes a citizen of a nation, he is entitled to work and live freely in that nation. He may vote and hold public office. He may participate in many benefits that he previously could not. Perhaps as significant as any is

the sense of belonging, as he now shares a common identity and common goals with his fellow-citizens.

Before the Christians at Ephesus obeyed the Gospel it could be said of them, “*That at that time ye 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*” (Eph. 2:12). But following their obedience to Christ’s Gospel of grace it was said, “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*” (verse 19, emphasis LM).

All Christians share a common identity and common goals. They are all members of one body, the church (4:4; 1:22-23). While different members may serve in different capacities, all work together toward common goals (4:16; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27): to seek and to save the lost (Matthew 28:18-20; compare with Luke 19:10), to build up the church (Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11), to defend the truth (Philippians 1:7; 2 Timothy 2:25-26; Titus 1:9-11; Jude 3), and to glorify God (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 3:21).

There is no “dual spiritual citizenship.” When Paul speaks of Christians’ citizenship in heaven, it is in contrast with those “*who mind earthly things*” (Phil. 3:19-20). If one’s citizenship is in the world, he cannot be a citizen of heaven (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15). If one does not “*abide in the doctrine of Christ*”; that is, in the teachings of the New Testament, he does not have God, and cannot enjoy participating in His kingdom (2

John 9; compare with 1 John 1:3, 7). Likewise, a citizen of heaven cannot participate in the works of the citizens of the world (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Ephesians 5:3-11).

**The Privilege of Pardon**

Some U.S. lawmakers are currently considering the possibility of granting amnesty to those who have immigrated illegally to this country and have subsequently remained more than five years. Even should this measure pass, the beneficiaries of it would still be required to pay a penalty and move to the rear of the line to apply for citizenship.

There are no illegal means of “immigrating” into the kingdom of God. All who would enter must be born spiritually into it (John 3:3, 5; 1 Peter 1:23). However, all its citizens were once spiritually dead, standing condemned by its King (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:10). Yet they were all able to receive instant citizenship and full pardon, with the penalty already paid for them (Isaiah 53:4-5; Rom. 8:1; Colossians 2:13; Heb. 8:12; 9:12; 1 John 2:12). As the apostle Peter said to the condemned on the day the kingdom was established, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission* (‘forgiveness or pardon, of sins [letting them go as if they had never been committed], remission of the penalty’) *of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*” (Acts 2:38). And as the hearers complied with Peter’s command to repent and be baptized, the Lord Himself added them to His church, just as He does today (verses 41, 47). And there are no “second-class” citizens in the kingdom of

God (Matt. 5:13-14; 20:1-16; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

### The Privilege of Promise

When one becomes a citizen of a prosperous nation, he should realize that there are no promises given that he will become prosperous himself. He hopes that an opportunity will come his way, and that he will be able to capitalize on that opportunity.

However, when one becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God, he has sure promises.

*For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, 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 (Phil. 3:20-21).*

The citizen of the kingdom of God knows that he has the favor of the King of kings, that his earthly body will be exchanged for a glorified body, and that he has an eternal hope in heaven. Contrast this with citizens of the world, who 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”* (verses 18-19).

Christians truly have been born again *“unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Peter 1:3-4). While they live on earth, they live *“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began”* (Titus 1:2).

### Conclusion

Citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is the greatest citizenship one can have in the world. It holds unmatched privileges of petition, protection, participation, pardon, and promise. Every citizen should remain constantly thankful for those privileges, and determine to live as an exemplary citizen, honorably representing the great kingdom of which he is a citizen. And every person who remains a citizen of the world should truly examine himself, considering whether the fleeting pleasures of his earthly citizenship are worth forsaking the eternal privileges of heavenly citizenship.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek Definitions*, E-Sword.

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## THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

by Gary W. Summers

On Paul Harvey's Friday broadcast, April 7<sup>th</sup>, came the following news item:

*National Geographic* has located an ancient manuscript in the Egyptian desert. It's written on papyrus. It has authenticated itself with carbon dating. It has been translated by Biblical scholars. And unlike the other four gospels, this one indicates that Judas betrayed Jesus at Jesus' request—hear this carefully, that Judas helped Jesus get rid of His physical flesh and liberate His spiritual self.

This announcement is not nearly so damaging as it sounds—in fact, it is not damaging at all. What makes this “news” item sound even remotely interesting is our modern-day ignorance of church history and writings. Most of us are unaware of how many “gospels” were actually written. There was the Gospel according to Thomas, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, and others listed below. The *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* was first published from 1867-1887. The Gospel of Judas was mentioned by them:

Of the gospels no longer extant, we know little more than that they once existed. We read in Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Origen, Eusebius, and other ecclesiastical writers of the Gospels of Eve or of Perfection, of Barnabas (ancient and modern), of Bartholomew, of Basilides, of Hesychius, of **Judas Iscariot**, of the Valentinians, of Apollos, of Cerinthus, of the Twelve Apostles, and several others (3:940) (emphasis gws).

Many of these were known but rejected and perhaps lost because they were fabrications—counterfeits considered unworthy of any merit. That someone found a manuscript of a lost, bogus book might be news, but it is not news that the writing existed. Before anyone makes another stupefying find, there are plenty of other works that were written. Philip Schaff, in his monumental work *History of the Christian Church*,

points out that many apocryphal books of Acts were written, including The Acts of Peter and Paul, The Acts of Thomas, The Acts of Thaddeus, The Acts of Barnabas, The Acts of Andrew, The Acts of Simon and Jude, and several others (1:188).

Many of these apocryphal books were written to establish some heresy that a sect had developed over the years. They all contradict the truth of the 27 books of the New Testament. They were written after the first century, after inspiration had ceased, and were fairly easily identifiable as fraudulent.

The very idea that Jesus asked Judas to betray Him is farcical. There were several times that they wanted to put Him to death; our Lord did not need any help in raising the ire of the Jews or giving them opportunities. But consider these facts (from the real gospel accounts).

1. Jesus said: *“The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born”* (Matthew 26:24). How hypocritical would have been to have asked Judas to do that which he would regret eternally? There is a vast difference between God allowing men to sin and encouraging them to do so.
2. Jesus’ spiritual self did not need to be liberated. He was God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14). He was so spiritual that He told Philip, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”* (John 14:9).

3. Judas did not betray Jesus to help Him, but rather for 30 pieces of silver—because he was a covetous man—a thief, who stole from the money box (John 12:4-6).

4. Judas betrayed Christ because he was motivated by Satan (Luke 22:3-4)—not by some alleged request from Jesus.

The Gospel of Judas is nothing more than an attempt to justify Judas and discredit Jesus—to turn light into darkness and darkness into light (Isaiah 5:20). The world would not have missed a thing if it had remained lost, but, having been found, it is certainly no threat to Christianity. It is just as apocryphal and invalid today as it was then. Most people will soon realize this fact.

**GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP  
- COLOSSIANS 3:17**

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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