

Meditation: DUAL CITIZENSHIP

With comments on the 4th of July

Verna's introduction: I appreciate our country, the United States of America, and am especially grateful for the freedoms we have as United States citizens. As a believer in Jesus Christ, I have trained my mind to associate earthly happenings and things with spiritual happenings and things. For example, when I think of our earthly nation around the 4th of July, I am reminded that I am also a citizen of God's holy nation, sometimes called the Kingdom of Heaven. When I think of the Declaration of Independence and the pledge of allegiance, I think God's people should have a Declaration of Dependence and a pledge of allegiance to God that we repeat every time we are tempted to act on our own apart from God. And when I think of freedom, my mind fills with grateful thoughts of the quality of freedom God offers to all people.

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Those who belong to God's faith family have a dual citizenship while we live on this earth, one natural and temporary, and one spiritual and permanent. There are some challenges to face when we want to be good citizens of both realms. The Bible is full of instruction about how to do just that. Following are three scripture passages that address this issue. In the first story from the gospels, an attempt to get Jesus in trouble with the Romans, who ruled their country, turned into an opportunity for him to give advice that is useful for us today.

The Pharisees laid plans to trap Jesus in his words, so they came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you speak and teach what is right, and you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Tell us then: what is your opinion? Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Astonished by his answer, they became silent and went away.

With one sentence, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," Jesus not only amazed his critics, he also lets us know it is possible to correctly relate to both the secular and the sacred elements in our lives. But we who have dual citizenship are also urged to have our priorities straight; we are meant to set our minds and hearts on things above, where Christ rules and God's will is done. And when the two realms clash, we are taught by example to obey God rather than people, no matter who they are. As for our job on earth, the apostle Paul says we serve in this world as Christ's ambassadors, no matter what other work we do! That's a high calling! From 2 Corinthians 5:

From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What a privilege to serve God as an ambassador, representing God, Jesus, and our heavenly nation to those we meet in this world! This image has motivated me all my adult life as a believer; I wanted to do my work well! The words of Jesus to his followers shortly before his ascension are similar. Listen: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

May the presence of Christ bring us peace. Amen.

References: Mark 12:13-17; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Matthew 28:18-20

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