

Citizenship Conflicts

Christians are “not of this world” according to our Master (John 18:36). Of course, necessity demands some involvement in the affairs of earth-life, but we must continually remind ourselves that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). The apostle Peter (1:1) referred to Christians as “strangers” (KJV) or “aliens” (NASB) He wanted them to see themselves as Jesus described them, “not of this world.”

But Christians have to be careful about their behavior among people who ARE of this world. Consider Peter’s instruction further in 1 Peter 2:11-12, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to ... Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (NASU) If we are not careful, our behavior among “Gentiles” can be counter-productive to our purpose in the world. Our purpose is to bring glory to God by helping others become citizens of heaven, too.

As difficult as it may be, this means we cannot become so engrossed in earthly concerns to the extent that we lose focus on our heavenly hope. Let the Gentiles be Gentiles, but keep yourselves pure (1 John 3:3).

- by Mark White

Giving Preference to One Another

God's nature is such that He shows no partiality (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9), and we are to reflect His nature. Scripture is quite clear that as Christians we must show no partiality either (1 Timothy, 5:21; James 2:1,9). We are all sinners, regardless of wealth or social standing. God expects us to live this truth by treating each other, ironically enough, as better than ourselves. In other words, when we show no partiality, we seek to make everyone and everyone else's interests more important than our own.

This is exactly what Paul writes in Romans 12:10: 'Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.' The NRSV says 'outdo one another in showing honor.' Such an attitude not only takes away the fleshly urge to pick favorites, but it also takes away a selfish desire to be some sort of 'Lone Christian'.

We have been given the local church as a blessing. We are meant to be an active participant in it. While the church is there to benefit us, when we approach it with that expectation we miss the entire point. It will serve us when other Christians are doing the same thing we are supposed to be doing -- 'outdoing one another in showing honor'. We don't do that by trying to be an adjunct member of a church: slipping in when we decide to, hurling criticisms when something doesn't suit us and choosing to get angry when for some strange reason everyone doesn't fall all over themselves to be kind to us. Every Christian must learn the truth that we are much easier to love when we are to some degree loveable. If some effort is made to include these 'Lone Christians', a stonewall is often the reaction. It's easier to criticize from afar than to be involved in the real work of building a congregation.

But when Paul writes, 'Do nothing from selfish or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others' (Philippians 2:3-4), he is telling us how to 'be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose' (vs. 2). These things are built not only through Bible study, but also through things like hospitality, even staying after services to chat.

Unless the Christians in a church actually like each other (and they have to know one another to like each other), they will never exhibit the type of unity of purpose God intends. They will be quick to hurl accusations and suspect impure motives when trouble does arise. And trouble will most assuredly arise if the congregation is not striving to be one, and each member is not striving to 'outdo one another in showing honor'.

- by Alan Cornett

Not Enough Time to Read the Bible?

How much time does it take to read from Genesis to Revelation? If you would read the Bible at a standard 'pulpit' speed (slow enough to be heard and understood), the reading time would be seventy-one (71) hours. If you would break that down into minutes and divide it into 365 days, you could read the entire bible, cover to cover, in one year by only reading 12 minutes per day. Is this too much time to spend reading about God?

- *selected*

Accurate Use of Religious Terms

We continue to hear folks misuse religious terminology. This happens frequently in regards to the various titles that define the roles of individuals. Here's a simple grouping of some terms that are synonyms:

Christian; disciple; servant of the Lord; child of God; saint. Note that the term saint applies to all baptized believers (Phil. 1:1), not to a special select few who have had special honors conferred upon them.

Elders; pastors; bishops; overseers; shepherds. Note that these are always mentioned in the plural. The term "pastor" has been misapplied by many people and is wrongly used as a synonym for "preacher". The term "bishop" has been perverted through the centuries to mean someone high up in a universal church organization. No such organizational structure or office is authorized in the Bible. There are to be "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23).

Preacher, evangelist. Observe that the preacher may be an elder (1 Peter 5:1) and thus might be a "pastor," but in most instances this is not true, and the terms are absolutely not synonyms. The preacher is often referred to as a "minister." This is not really inaccurate, for all Christians are to be ministers (literally meaning one who acts as the agent or instrument of another), but to use the term "minister" exclusively for the preacher leaves a potential for misunderstanding. We should stress that the New Testament teaches no 'clergy/laity' distinction. It is very important to point out that the term "reverend" is found only once in the Bible (Ps. 111:9) and is applied only to God, not to any man.

Let's be careful to use Bible terms in Bible ways. Accurate use of these Bible words shows that we are "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).