

THOUGHTS

By the father/son team
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SPEAKERS ON THE WORD TODAY

OCTOBER

2015

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

I recently returned from Quito, Ecuador, where Our Shepherd's mission team served for one week helping to build housing for a mission school. On the return trip, about two hours outside of Quito I absentmindedly took off my belly bag in the bathroom, then exited without it. Though we turned the bus around after only a couple minutes my belly bag containing my passport, driver's license and a credit card were all taken.

A mad dash in missionary Mark Schaefer's car ensued as we tried to reach the U.S. Embassy in Quito before it closed that Friday afternoon! I just made it by five minutes, but the staff said that the cashier had left for the weekend, as it was heading into Labor Day, and that the passport could not be processed. There were several twists and turns which ensued, but eventually I was able to secure a "limited validity" passport to enable me to fly home the next day.

The incident brought new appreciation of the responsibilities and benefits of citizenship. Particularly, I didn't enjoy not being able to return to my homeland. I could hardly imagine the stress and displeasure if I had been detained for an extended period of time. The newfound appreciation for my citizenship spilled over to my devotional time when I read in Philippians 3, "...many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (v18b-21)."

The Bible teaches us that God has through his Son, Jesus, adopted any human who believes on Christ for salvation as his own child (see John 1:10-14). A Christian is a member of God's Kingdom, an eternal kingdom. Jesus told many parables with spiritual applications, which are understood only in light of his Kingdom.

Lutherans teach that there are three kingdoms, or realms, of God's rule where his people can be found. One is the Kingdom of Power, which corresponds to the physical world. In it we find both the people with their minds on earthly things, as described in the above passage from Philippians, and the Christians who have their minds on heavenly things. The Kingdom of Grace is the Church of Jesus, those who have been redeemed and live by faith. The Kingdom of Glory refers to Heaven itself, in which there will be found neither unbeliever, nor hypocrite.

You cannot bribe your way into Heaven. You cannot be "good enough" to earn it through attempting to do more good than sin. You cannot enter Heaven by proxy, letting someone else's faith substitute for your own.

Thoughts
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*The Bible is God's Word . . . Jesus is God's "Word" made flesh . . .
His death and resurrection, the message needed Today.*

October

2

I consider Christian Baptism to be a bit like a passport. A passport is an official document notifying your citizenship, while baptism is an official act signifying your membership in Heaven. God has issued our "heavenly passport," free of charge, signing it in the blood of His Son, Jesus, spilled on the cross as he died in order to offer you heavenly citizenship! Value your inclusion in Heaven as more important than any earthly thing!

IF YOU DON'T KEEP UP...

I have felt humiliated lately on the golf course. Just three years ago I was a respectable golfer, not PGA material by any means, but good enough not to be embarrassed among those who play scratch golf. Now? Oh, man, based on my last two outings, thinking of how far I have fallen from my previous skill level I hang my head in shame.

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What happened? I merely stopped playing for a while. I used to play at least once each week, but for the past three years I dropped off; this year I was on a course twice. No wonder my game has gone downhill. I didn't keep up on the practice, so why should I think I could still hit the ball well?

Perhaps you see a spiritual analogy coming? How many people do you know who stopped "practicing" faith? They stopped going to church, stopped reading the Bible, gave up a devotional and prayer time, and stopped giving their offerings, too. Perhaps you can guess what will happen to their spirit – the same thing that happened to my golf game!

1

The pernicious part of such spiritual slacking is the deception that the ego/mind tells us we've not changed. We actually think we are still good at what we once did. We discount the slippage because we haven't revisited the faith practices, just as I wanted to believe that I was still a decent golfer. No wonder so many people who have sin by omission (omitting the works God requires) think they are still "good people." Like delusional athletes, it's easy to think we're still good at something when we don't do it for an extended time. The apostle John warns believers, "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully (v.8)."

5

Repentance and recovery is attainable. Repentance means doing a U-turn, or returning to previous good works. I will never recapture my golf form if I don't accept the slippage and get back to working on it. You will not walk in the grace of God if you don't repent of the prideful self-righteous attitude and return to "walking with God," through living your faith.

Keep in mind that I don't need to be a good golfer to enter Heaven, but we all need to have a living, that is, active and growing faith, to see eternal life!

Blessings!
Douglas W. Schroeder