

Dual Citizenship

Bastian Fähnrich, 16 February 2020

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Today's topic is about citizenship, especially, dual citizenship. Who of you has one citizenship, a single citizenship? Just raise your hands. How many of you have dual citizenship? Oh, interesting! How many of you have even multiple citizenships? Wow, amazing!

I'm really glad to see that all of you have at least one citizenship. But actually, everyone of us should or could have at least two citizenships, or dual citizenship. Let's get back to this in a short while.

Last year I was granted the Finnish citizenship, in addition to my German citizenship. There were many requirements that I had to meet in order to become a citizen of Finland. For example, I had to have stayed or resided in Finland for at least seven years. I was required of knowing the Finnish language. In addition, I had to give proof of my employment and livelihood. And I needed to invest time and money to get the Finnish citizenship, and a Finnish passport.

Strangely, in the process of applying for my Finnish citizenship, no official authority ever asked me *why* I wanted to become a Finnish citizen. Really, I wasn't asked and didn't have to give *reasons* for wanting to obtain the Finnish citizenship. Furthermore, no one questioned me about the *implications* of becoming or being a Finnish citizen, *what* it implies to become and be a citizen of this country.

I myself, however, had thought a lot about my reasons for becoming a Finnish citizen. And what implications it might have for my life and my family, and perhaps even the Finnish society. For example, after having lived here up north for more than two decades, I thought it reasonable to get the right to vote on a national level. I like the country, its people and politics, and so I wanted to be able to also cast my vote and fulfill my rights and duties in Finland to the fullest.

Moreover, I very much identify with the Nordic people and way of life, and thought it a good reason to confirm my identity as a "Finn" also by becoming officially a citizen of this country. I also reasoned that – when travelling abroad and visiting, for example, Israel – it might be better to rather use a Finnish than a German passport. The Finnish passport is one of the world's most travel-friendly documents. In 2019 it offered visa-free access to altogether 187

countries. For comparison, passports from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria offer access to less than 30 countries.

By the way, a Finnish passport is beautifully crafted in the inside. On each page it features Nordic animals and wildlife – for me this serves also as a good reason for identifying with this country and confirming my identity on paper. A few years ago I did a DNA test which revealed that more than 30 % of myself or my heritage is located in the North. Even though this has nothing to do with the concept of citizenship, I felt compelled and inclined to make this part of myself official. Last but not least, I reasoned that Finnish people – especially my wife Hanna and son Samuel – would appreciate my Finnish citizenship and gladly welcome me into their homeland as one of their kind and people.

So, now I have dual citizenship – the German and the Finnish citizenship. I can travel freely and enjoy all the rights and fully partake in the social and political life of these two countries. And I can live up and adhere to my duties under the law given in these countries as well as in the wider European community. But there is more to dual citizenship. Much more. At the beginning I mentioned that everyone of us should or could have at least two citizenships, or dual citizenship. How come? I give you a hint. You have probably guessed it anyway. Look at the Finnish flag! What does it show? Let me know. Yes, indeed. A cross. Like in the flags of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, only to name but a few. The Finnish cross just has a different colour than the others. But it is foremostly a cross. Which represents Christianity. Christianity is not a nation, state or country, of course, but a worldwide community of faith.

If the *law* of Finland or any country in this world partly defines our citizenship and identity, then the *Bible* defines us as Christians. The Bible even claims for Christian believers that “*our citizenship is in heaven*” ([Philippians 3:20](#)). Yes indeed, those of us following Jesus the Messiah belong to God’s people. Again, the Bible says: “*Once you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (...) But now in Christ Jesus (...) you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people*” ([Ephesians 2:12,13,19](#)).

If any of us or all of us call ourselves today believers in Christ – here and now –, then we know and acknowledge also that once indeed we were foreigners and strangers to God and his people. Just as the Bible tells us: we were excluded from all the hope and promises and without God in the world. We did certainly have no access to the citizenship of heaven. Moreover, there was and is no way for anyone of us to gain heavenly citizenship by our own merit and efforts. On the contrary, our heavenly citizenship was granted to us thanks to Jesus. Christ

came into this world to be with us and reconcile us to God. Before Jesus came to us, our sin kept us separate from God. We believe that only Christ overcame sin and granted us to become and be a member of his community of faith or God's people.

What should we think of all of this and, especially, our heavenly citizenship? It may be difficult to understand. Why? Because even though our citizenship is in heaven, we remain sinners, as we are still living in this world ([Colossians 3:1](#)). We have a dual citizenship. We live our daily lives here on this earth, struggling with temptations and the sin of this world. At the same time we set our hearts and thoughts on things above and on those from God, on everything of good origin. At times we may even look ahead to the new earth and heaven, to a time when everything and every Christian believer will be perfected. For the time being, however, we are imperfect in every possible way. In our walk through life, we are thus foremostly called to focus on Jesus, the originator and perfecter of our faith. In addition to Jesus, we are called to turn to the Holy Spirit, our Guide, and the Bible, the light on our path of life.

You have probably heard fellow Christian believers saying "We are *in* the world, but not *of* this world." This is true. Yet the Bible puts it even better, and gives us many good reasons and implications for our heavenly citizenship while we are still living our earthly lives in this world. It is certainly not a comfortable life, as we live for God and may even suffer for being Christians ([1 Peter 4](#)). But I am convinced that God provides comfort enough for us to lead us through our lives as followers of Jesus.

At some point in Jesus' life and ministry, he prayed for his disciples, and thus for us as well ([John 17](#)). In his prayer Jesus says that we are not *of* this world, even as he himself is not *of* this world. According to Jesus we are sent *into* the world, not *out of* the world. So, as Jesus commissions us *to* the world, he consequently prays for our protection from the evil one, because we face plenty of evil on earth – all kinds of temptation and sin, both within and around us ([John 15:19](#) and [John 17:14-19](#)). But thanks to Jesus's commission, there's more to our earthly lives and our heavenly citizenship than dealing with sin and evil in the world we are living in.

Let me turn to the Bible and present four points, or good reasons and implications for our heavenly citizenship. They all point to Jesus, the originator and perfecter of our faith. I'll first present the more basic point and reason and then get to the more advanced ones as well as the implications these have for us as heavenly citizens in this world:

- 1) God loves us so much that he wants to freely grant us – each and every person in this world – to become a member of his people and receive citizenship in heaven ([John 3:16](#)). As we commit our sinful lives to Jesus, we become a member of God’s people and are given access to citizenship in heaven. Furthermore, we are granted a new identity in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). In Finland each citizen has a personal identity code. It consists of our birth date as well as numbers and possibly a letter, for example 100374-923C. As Christian believers, however, the first part of our identity code includes the day we started our life with Christ – we could refer to it as our “born-again date” ([John 3:3](#), [1 Peter 1:3](#)). The numbers and letter in the remaining part of our Christian identity code points to God’s reason for giving us a new identity. It is the same for all Christians. It represents God’s love for us, as we can read in [John 3:16](#). The remainder of our Christian identity code is equally the same for each believer and reads 316J.

- 2) God’s love does not end with us. He wants to welcome and grant heavenly citizenship to as many people as possible ([Mark 16:14-16](#)). This is where we as Christian believers and heavenly citizens come into play with regard to Jesus’s mission and his commission to us. Christ turns us into his ambassadors ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)) and thus we are appointed to serve in Jesus’ “ministry of reconciliation” ([2 Corinthians 5:18](#)). This is quite a special reason and implication for our heavenly citizenship. We have the same mission as Jesus – to reconcile people to God – and share salvation to all nations and to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#), [Acts 13:47](#), [Mark 13:10](#), [16:15](#), [Matthew 5:13-14](#), [Matthew 28:19-20](#)). We help all people in and of this world to overcome evil and sin with the power of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We welcome everyone willing to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord into God’s people, his community of faith. What a privilege we have as citizens of heaven – here and now!

- 3) God’s love is best represented and presented in Christ Jesus. In him we have everything that we need as heavenly citizens. As citizens of heaven we do not even need our own passports. Jesus is the passport. In our lives on earth, we should thus be(come) like Christ and help others to see God and become and be God’s people ([John 13:15](#), [Philippians 2:5](#), [Romans 8:29](#), [Ephesians 4:13](#), [1 Corinthians 4:16](#), [1 Corinthians 11:1](#), [2 Corinthians 3:18](#), [1 Peter 2:21](#)). Our heavenly citizenship is lived out and becomes visible for other people in Christlikeness. We will never really be as perfect as Jesus in this life, but we can become more heavenly and

godly in character and have more earthly impact, the more we attain to Jesus and reflect his prime example and image. Like Jesus, we should not hate this world or pay back the evil we face as followers of Christ, but love and show mercy and compassion, and forgive, just as we have been forgiven by Jesus. Of course, we should be transformed into the likeness of God, and not be conformed to this world ([Romans 8:29](#), [Romans 12:2](#) and [Ephesians 4:22-24](#)). This implies that we are called to truthfully follow Jesus' example and way of life. In times where evil forces of the world and even within us perpetrate injustice or merely tempt us to give in to sin of any kind, we might need to go against it and the mainstream of this world, and adhere to the character and actions of Jesus instead. Recently Hanna and I went to see the movie "A hidden life". The film features the true life story of an Austrian farmer and his family in WWII. The farmer was a devout Christian and refused to fight for Hitler's army – eventually at the cost of his own life and great suffering of his wife and daughters, and mother. I have rarely had the chance to see such a great movie portraying real-life characters so eloquently as followers of Christ as in "A hidden life". The movie not only shows the external resistance of the farmer but also the struggles for justice and righteous living between people as well as his internal struggles as a believer and in relation to his family. Also, his wife is depicted as a Christlike person. As mentioned, eventually the farmer is stripped of all his rights of his earthly citizenship by the Nazis, but he holds up the banner of Christ and stays true to his citizenship in heaven.

- 4) God's love is the prime blessing, but he has many blessings to offer to us and the world. The Bible says that we are "blessed to be a blessing" ([Genesis 12:2](#)). We have been blessed foremostly by becoming and being a member of God's people, a citizen of heaven. In addition, we receive(d) many more blessings to grow and thrive in our lives as Christian believers. Thus we ought to use our earthly "possessions" and skills, our God-given talents, spiritual gifts and fruit for the benefit of other people ([1 Corinthians 1:5-7](#), [1 Corinthians 2:12](#), [1 Peter 4:10](#), [Galatians 5:22-23](#)). By doing so, we always have to remember that we can do nothing apart from Jesus; he appoints us, equips us and keeps us to do good and bear fruit, even amidst the resistance, suffering and pain in this world ([John 15:5](#), [John 15:5,16](#), [Philippians 4:13](#)). Let's trust that Jesus will be with us always, to the very end of the age; and that then there will be a new heaven and a new earth outmeasuring all the blessings of the present time ([Matthew 28:20](#), [Revelation 21](#)). Amen.