

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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GOD, COUNTRY, GUNS, WAR #1

During the recent US elections, a candidate for local office placed ads on local radio touting that his candidacy was about God and guns, as if the two go together. It is safe to state that in the US, Christians, especially ones labeled as fundamental or conservative, are most often connected with not only God and guns but also with love of country and war to defend the country against enemies.

Now, before launching into what is on my heart in subsequent issues of this series, I want to be clear on a few points.

First, we all are to love the Lord our God, both the Father and the Son. Love sums up all the commandments and the law of God, for **God is love**.

And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.” (Matthew 22.37-38 NASB)

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.” (John 8.42 NASB)

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14.15 NASB)

“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” (John 14.21 NASB)

So, it matters not what label we take on or others place on us. We are commanded to love the One who is love.

Second, as believers, we can love our respective countries, but we must realize that we have a citizenship that is much greater than being a citizen of any one nation, especially ones that do not proclaim Jesus as their King.

For our citizenship is in the heavens, whence also a Saviour we await—the Lord Jesus Christ.... (Philippians 3.20 YLT)

For our country is in heaven; from where the Saviour for whom we are waiting will come, even the Lord Jesus Christ.... (Philippians 3.20 BBE)

It is interesting that one translation uses the word *country*. This goes along with what we are told in Hebrews in regard to what could be called the hall of faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac

and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11.8-10 NASB)

For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11.14-16 NASB)

I realize that for those who believe that when we die we go to heaven, the better country is heaven, which is seen as a place far away from the earth; a place with golden streets and huge mansions. However, this is not what is meant by these verses or any other verses in Scripture. Those of faith are to desire and long for a country that is heavenly in nature or character, not heavenly in location. We need to keep in mind that the saints of old, including Abraham, were looking for something on earth that is of God, that is, heavenly in character. This speaks of **the reign of the heavens** coming to this earth to rule over the nations, for **the heavens do rule**. I refer you to issue #02-0855, August 5, 2008. This is the same thing as the Lord teaching His disciples to pray: **Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven** (Matthew 6.10).

As a side note, the heavenly city that Abraham was looking for is not even a physical city. The heavenly city is New Jerusalem, which is the new creation in Christ, the people of God in the image of the Son. Paul, who was caught away to see the new creation, describes it for us in Ephesians.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2.19-22 NASB)

New Jerusalem is the dwelling of God in spirit. In other words, it is a spiritual house made up of spiritual people who occupy immortal, spiritual, celestial, and glorified bodies. Christ is the Son who is faithful over God's house, whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end (see Hebrews 3.6). Let us hold fast our confidence that this is true and that we are waiting for the Son to come from heaven to meet us and to glorify us so that we might remain on earth and reign with Him over the nations (1 Thessalonians 1.10; Philippians 3.20).

Third, guns and war imply killing enemies. Many Christians see enemies of the US in many areas of the world, especially in the Muslim world. But we need to be reminded of the Lord's command to us who believe.

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5.43-48 NASB)

We are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and He is perfect love. We need to heed this exhortation and love our enemies, not try to destroy them. More needs to be said on this third point, but this must be reserved for subsequent issues.