

# Citizens and Sons of the Kingdom of God

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**The benefits and blessings in store for citizens and sons of the kingdom of God are beyond what most people have ever dreamed of or imagined! Yet this potential is real, and is available to you now! But what does it mean to be such a "citizen," or a "son" of God (in a generic sense, without regard to sex)? And how may this be achieved?**

In the Bible, a number of metaphors are used to illustrate and explain how God relates to us as human beings, his creatures. The metaphors include agricultural activities, such as planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, winnowing, and the produce of such activities, such as fruits of the vine, the field, and of trees, firstfruits and fruits of the later harvest. There are metaphors of family relationships, as Father and sons, or children, husband and wife. Also, metaphors of citizenship, alien residents, and foreigners.

The Bible has a great deal to say about how we can enter into a relationship with God as "citizens" of his eternal kingdom, and "sons" in his divine family. But much of what it says has been misunderstood, or at best, poorly understood, by many.

Regardless of your race, nationality, or social status, you can become a full citizen of the kingdom of God, and be counted as a son of God. Learning more about what the Bible teaches us about our potential relationship to God as citizens of his kingdom, and sons, or children of his household, can help us to know God better, relate to him on a more personal level, and become or remain firmly committed to him.

Some, perhaps quite a number, even among those who've entered into a committed relationship with God, have had the mistaken idea that when one repents of sin, is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit, he has "applied," in a sense, to become a citizen of God's kingdom, and a member of his household. Those who repent in faith and are baptized, by this reckoning, are not really citizens of the kingdom and children of God, but are only "applicants."

As we will see, however, that notion, that at baptism we "apply" to become citizens of the kingdom and members of the household of God, is quite mistaken and entirely misleading. It is not at all what the Scriptures teach.

What the Scriptures actually teach about this ought to be far more encouraging, and ought to help reveal to our minds the deep intimacy with which God views our relationship to him.

First we need to understand that in one sense, every human being is considered

by him to be one of his children.

Paul said to a crowd of Athenians:

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, `For **we are also His offspring.**' Therefore, since **we are the offspring of God**, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising" (Acts 17:24-29).

So we see here that we are -- every human being included -- the "offspring" of God, in a sense, his children. God is not indifferent to his children. Jesus said, "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7).

As God takes notice of sparrows, surely he is not less concerned about human beings made in his image (Genesis 1:27).

### Salvation Open to All

Jesus was sent to pay for the sins of the whole of mankind, that **everyone** might have an opportunity for salvation. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

As God's created beings, his offspring, his children in a sense, created in the likeness of God in certain respects, all human beings have the potential for salvation. And God will make salvation attainable for every human being who is willing to meet his terms for salvation, that is, eternal life in his kingdom.

### Cut Off From God

Human beings, however, beginning with Adam, have rejected God, and as a result most have been cut off from God, in a spiritual sense. Their status relative to God, for the most part, has been one of **aliens**, NOT citizens, of his kingdom, and without a meaningful relationship with him.

Paul expressed the condition of unregenerate Gentiles in his letter to the

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Ephesians. Ephesus was a Greek city, and most of the converts in Ephesus at the time Paul wrote his letter were Gentiles. Note what Paul said to them:

“And you He made alive, **who were dead in trespasses and sins**, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, just as the others.

.....

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- that at that time you were without Christ, **being aliens** from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**” (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12).

Note that they had been “dead” in their trespasses, that is, they were under the penalty of death due to their sins (Romans 6:23). They were following the way of Satan. They were children of wrath. They were aliens, strangers, without God in the world.

But notice in Ephesians 2:3, that the Gentiles were “**among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh**, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

In other words, not only Gentiles, but Israelites, too, had walked after the lusts of the flesh, and had become children of wrath.

The nation of Israel had been chosen by God out of all the nations of the earth to enter into a covenant relationship with him. If they kept the covenant, God told them:

“Now therefore, **if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant**, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**” (Exodus 19:5-6).

Having entered into the covenant with God, the children of Israel were now considered his sons, in a special way. They were not cut off from God as the rest of the world was. Under the covenant relationship they were especially blessed of God. He dealt with them in a direct way. He was to be their God, as opposed to false gods worshiped by all other nations on earth.

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Israel as a whole was viewed as God's son, so to speak. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1).

Israel, though it entered into a special covenant relationship with God (Exodus 19:7-8), was a carnal nation. Most of the people of Israel, though they had many opportunities to repent, did not do so. They continued to walk after the false gods of the nations. They did not keep the covenant.

Therefore God rejected them, sent them back into captivity, and hid his face from them.

"As they called them, [As the prophets called Israel to repentance] So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images. I taught Ephraim to walk [Ephraim, as the leading tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel, put here for the nation as a whole, cf. verses 8, 12], Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king, Because they refused to repent" (Hosea 11:2-5).

Having once entered into the relationship with God, as his sons in an intimate way, Israel was eventually cut off, because they too had continued to walk after idols, and the lusts of the flesh. God sent the nation of Israel into captivity by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:14-18, 23).

However, God has not forgotten Israel. And he will one day bring them to repentance, and reclaim them as his sons:

"Then God said: 'Call his name Lo-Ammi, [Hebrew for not-my-people] For you are not My people, And I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," There it shall be said to them, "You are sons of the living God" ' " (Hosea 1:9-10; cf. Isaiah 43:1-6).

### Citizens and Sons Now

Getting back to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote to the Gentiles in the Church - and his remarks could apply also to those among the converted members of the Church who were descendants of Israel: "**Now**, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but **fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God**" (Ephesians 2:19).

Relatively few of us speak or read Greek, the language in which this letter to the Ephesians was originally written. However, with a Greek-English interlinear Bible and the *Analytical Greek Lexicon* you can find the morphology, or grammatical

form, of particular Greek words used in the New Testament. There are now a number of computer programs that will give you the same information.

The morphology for the Greek word translated "you are" (NKJV) in Ephesians 2:19 is in part, present tense, indicative mood. Usually, not always but usually, a verb in the present tense, indicative mood in New Testament Greek implies present and continuing action, as in this verse. Paul is saying to the believers in Ephesus, that they are "no longer" considered strangers, but are - **now** - citizens of spiritual Israel and members of God's household.

These words imply citizenship, as in citizens of a nation, a polity, a country. They also imply membership in a household, or a family, in this case, God's family. There's nothing here about "applying" to be citizens, or "applying" to be members of the household.

The reference is to the fact that as Gentiles, both spiritually as well as physically, the Gentile converts in Ephesus had been heretofore regarded as foreigners, non-citizens, and non-members of God's household. But now, through repentance and conversion, through the mercy of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they had been brought into a saving relationship with God, and now they were no longer cut off from him, but were now citizens of his kingdom, and members of his household.

Among the Israelites, who had been chosen of God as his nation, there were "citizens," full members of the Israelite nation, and there were strangers who dwelt among them, but were not full citizens of the nation, as well as foreigners passing through or dwelling in other lands.

And so it is also in a spiritual sense. In the spiritual application, a "Jew," a citizen of spiritual Israel, a seed of Abraham, is one who is genuinely converted. One who has surrendered to God and obeys God through faith.

"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:25-29).

Paul goes on to further explain that those of faith - whether circumcised (Jews or Israelites) or uncircumcised (Gentiles) - are counted as "seed," or descendants of Abraham, and therefore citizens, as it were, of spiritual Israel, and as members of the household of faith, heirs of the promise belonging to the seed of Abraham.

" 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.' Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:7-16).

Paul further explains (in Romans 9) that it is those who walk in faith, like Abraham, who are true Israelites, and who are, in a spiritual sense, the children of God and heirs of the promise.

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption [or sonship, as it could be translated], the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. **For they are not all Israel who are of Israel**, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' **That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed"** (Romans 9:1-8).

### Faith and Obedience

Note that the "seed" being spoken of here, the "children of the promise," meaning the promise of an inheritance in the kingdom of God, are accounted as children of God. **What makes one a child of the promise?** As Paul explains, it is faith, the faith that produces godly character through which one becomes obedient to God.

"What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the

law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law" (Romans 9:30-32).

It's very important to understand that the "law" Paul speaks of, to the Jews, included their traditions, which took precedence over the word of God. These were, "...legal determinations, which traditionalism declared absolutely binding on all, **not only of equal, but even greater obligation than Scripture itself.** Thus we read: 'The sayings of the elders have more weight than those of the prophets' (Jer. Ber. i. 7); '**an offence against the sayings of the Scribes is worse than one against those of Scripture**' (Sanh. xi. 3)]. And this not illogically, since tradition was [considered to be] equally of Divine origin with Holy Scripture... [as the Pharisees viewed it ]" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim, Hendrickson, 1993, p. 68).

Their pursuit of righteousness through their traditions - their "law," in place of faith and obedience to God and his law - ironically led them to reject the commandments of God, as Jesus pointed out, and ultimately, to reject Christ.

"He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men - the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.' He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition' " (Mark 7:6-9).

Continuing in Romans: "For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame' " (Romans 9:32-33).

Paul explains further:

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, **have not submitted to the righteousness of God**" (Romans 10:1-3).

Note they refused to submit to the righteousness of God, as expressed in his word. God does not regard as his children in a spiritual sense those who pursue righteousness through their own customs, or traditions, or their own ideas of what righteousness is (whether Jewish, "Christian," pagan, or otherwise). God's children, spiritually, are those who pursue and attain godly righteousness through genuine faith in Christ, which implies obedience through faith to his commandments.

It is when we submit to God in genuine repentance and faith in Christ, and quit living according to the lusts of the flesh, but seek in faith to live righteously before God in accordance with his law that we become citizens of his kingdom, and members of his spiritual household.

Paul wrote:

“For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

In Philippians 3:20 the Greek word translated "is" is also present tense, indicative mood. Our citizenship **is now** in heaven. That is we have not just a citizenship in whatever physical nation we happen to be citizens of, but a claim to citizenship in the Kingdom of God, as members of his spiritual family and nation.

Moreover, Paul wrote:

“Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and **conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son** of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:12-15).

God is now allowing Satan to continue to hold sway over mankind on the earth. When Christ returns he will dispose of Satan and take over direct rule on the earth, establishing the authority of his government directly over mankind. Meanwhile, however, **if we have repented and received the Holy Spirit, we are considered members or citizens of his kingdom now, no longer given over to Satan, but having submitted ourselves to God's authority and rule.**

Through godly faith, one is made a **son of God** (spiritually) as well:

“For **you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are **Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise**” (Galatians 3:26-29).

Again, the verb here in verse 26, translated "you are" -- as in “you are all sons of God” -- is in the present tense, indicative mood. If you have "put on Christ" through, genuine, ongoing repentance and a valid baptism (Acts 2:38), you are now a son of God, and an heir according to the promise.



### The Promised Inheritance

Even though we are now sons, and citizens of God's kingdom, **we await our inheritance**. Just as the Israelites in the wilderness, before they entered the promised land, were **members of the nation of Israel, although they had not yet received the promised inheritance**.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, **that we should be called children of God!** Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, **now we are children of God**; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1-2).

Note that John says "now we are children of God." Even though we are now children of God, we await the resurrection, and the "metamorphosis" so to speak, when we will no longer be flesh and blood, but **we shall share God's nature in the very fullest sense as members of the divine family** (1 Corinthians 15:49-53; Philippians 3:21; 2 Peter 1:4).

John went on to write:

“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

We did not "apply" to become citizens of God's kingdom and family at baptism. We entered into a spiritual fellowship with him and became "citizens" of his kingdom at that time and members of his spiritual household, if we had truly repented and were genuinely converted.

Yet, as God's children we must live lives pleasing to God, and becoming for a child of God. We must keep ourselves pure from the world, pure from sin, as we strive to live lives of repentance and faith toward God.

We are being judged by whether we will remain faithful to our commitment or not, as many Scriptures show.

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17).

Note that as members of God's household, we are being judged.

If we are not faithful, we can be stripped of our citizenship and cast out, as happened to the ancient Israelites.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?

Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself **should become disqualified**" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27;

As we repent in faith God qualifies us for citizenship in his kingdom (Colossians 1:12-13), but we can yet disqualify ourselves if we do not remain faithful.

"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Peter admonished:

"Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1-10).

While as we've seen we are citizens of the kingdom, we have not yet entered into the kingdom fully, as the Israelites in the wilderness had not yet entered the promised land. We could, as they did, lose out on our inheritance if we turn aside from God.

"For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:20-

21; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

We have entered into the covenant relationship with God, in a way similar to Israel at Mt. Sinai, but we have not yet entered the “rest,” the promised land.

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest,” ' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'; and again in this place: 'They shall not enter My rest.' Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, 'Today,' after such a long time, as it has been said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. **Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.**” (Hebrews 4:1-11).

The inheritance is ours to lose, but we have yet to receive it in full.

"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the **saints to possess the kingdom.** (Daniel 7:21-22).

Jesus said:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, `Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' “ (Matthew 25:31-34).

If we overcome, we will remain sons of God in his family and kingdom forever.

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

Meanwhile, it's important to remember that we are God's children now, in one way

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or another. He is our Father, and he cares for us as any loving Father cares for his children, only more so. Seek God's guidance and direction in your life, and never forget that you are one of his children.

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