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TRUE NATIONALITY What Country Do You Belong To? ~by Caleb Daniels

Growing up, words like nationality always seemed much too political or too high above my pay-grade to give them much thought or attention. It was a word that I might have been able to tell you a general idea about the meaning, but would only really use if in a history or government class. If you did a quick Google search, you would see that the word nationality is defined as 'a legal identification of a person in international law, establishing the person as a subject, a national, of a sovereign state. It affords the state jurisdiction over the person and affords the person the protection of the state against other states.' That's kind of a lot for a quick definition, and you may have stopped reading it halfway through. I don't blame you.

All of that is just the professional or fancy way of saying that you belong to a certain land or country, and as being a citizen of that country, you get its perks and protections. That seems like a pretty fair deal, doesn't it? As much as everyone absolutely loves taxes (and no, of course that isn't sarcastic), they serve as your tribute to keeping your country in order. In turn, your country is supposed to keep you in order (yes, some take that idea to the extreme).

Within this give and take relationship there sometimes arises a sense of 'national pride' or 'patriotism.' This is when you not only belong to a country, but you love that country and promote it. It is these types of feelings that lead people to go out and fight wars for their country, even to the point of willingly laying down their own life. That's quite the level of devotion.

Living in America, we as Christians are afforded a plethora of liberties. And, without getting into political differences of how we think the country is being run right now, we have a lot to be grateful for living here. In many instances, it might be appropriate to have the thought, *"I'm proud to be an American!"* This country has done a lot for you, and that ought to be recognized.

However, when it comes to being a Christian, regardless if you live in this country or another, there should be the sense that this country is not the only one you belong to.

When you consider the well-known chapter of Hebrews 11, the automatic thoughts that come to mind would likely be 'the chapter about faith,' or more specifically, 'the hall of fame of faithful characters.' That is very true. Within its verses are some of the biggest names of the Bible and brief descriptions about what they did and how they lived. However, I have always believed that the most powerful set of verses in this chapter lie near the middle, where no specific person is mentioned.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." – Hebrews 11: 13-16.

A major theme of God dealing with earlier Biblical characters (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob etc.) was the promises of great things to come. For example, one of the three promises given to Abraham was the promise of a future great land (**Gen.**

12: 1-3). Abraham never dwelt in this Promised Land. He was a nomad living in a tent, looking forward for what was to come. However, notice how the text of the verses from Hebrews doesn't focus on the earthly land. In fact, the people who were alluded to in the passage openly accepted that they were pilgrims on the earth.

This gets to the key verse of this passage: Vs. 16. **"Now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country..."** What a remarkable way of thinking! As great of a promise that God had made to them of their earthly Promised Land, they were not set on that image. Instead, they were set on the image of a country which they could not see with their eyes; a country that required the definition of faith given in Vs. 1: **"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."**

This Heavenly country is where their true citizenship lay. This was the country that they belonged to. And why would they want it to be? Because **"[God] has prepared a city for them."** That gives me chills. If God, the Author of all creation and the Giver of all good things has prepared a city for them, then they absolutely want to be there.

The same thing is offered to us today. We too can have a **"citizenship from Heaven" (Phil. 3: 20)**. We too **"seek the [city] to come" (Heb 13: 14)**. What an amazing promise that is offered to each one of us.

So, I will ask each of you the question now: What country do you belong to? Is it one made without human hands, or one that was established in 1776 AD? I hope that you can say the former, because that is the only nationality that will ever matter and that we will ever need.



Why Hymn Books but Not Pianos?

- by Steve Fontenot

Some may wonder how one could object to a piano in worship to God and yet have hymn books. Neither is specifically mentioned in the New Testament.

Let's illustrate with Noah and the ark. When God told Noah to build an ark out of "gopher wood" (Gen. 6:14), that did NOT authorize Noah to use pine, fir, or cedar, for these are ANOTHER KIND of wood. To use another kind of wood WITHOUT AUTHORITY would have been presumption. However, that command DID authorize tools to build with, and red, white, or yellow gopher wood (if there be such), even though not specifically mentioned.

Likewise, when God said, "sing" (Eph. 5:19), that did NOT authorize pianos, guitars, and organs, for these are ANOTHER KIND of music. To offer God another kind of music WITHOUT AUTHORITY is presumption. But, the command to sing DID authorize hymn books, a leader, lights, and harmony, though not specifically mentioned.