

## Lessons from the Current Immigration Controversy

On going discussions about the immigration policies of the United States have sharply divided Americans. The particular public policy implications are not our interest here. However, there are some lessons that can be drawn from the marches, protests and speeches that shed some light on the church of Christ.

Citizenship can be precisely defined. The discussion in our country revolves around citizenship in the United States, something that can be precisely defined. An individual either is a citizen of the United States or he is not, there is no middle ground. Spiritually, people are either in the church or they are not. An examination of one's own actions and motives can precisely determine membership. Such determination comes because the terms for entry are set and easily known.

Terms for entry are set and easily known. Persons desiring to enter the U.S. know there are laws and regulations for their entry. The rules are not secret but are easily learned by making inquiry. Compliance with these rules lead to citizenship in the U.S. and nowhere else. The terms for entry into the church are likewise set and knowable. Like an alien desiring citizenship in the U.S., and alien sinner seeks and *hears* the truth of the Gospel (Romans 10:17) which produces faith or *belief*. It is a truism that belief is a requirement of salvation (Mark 16:16). It is almost always necessary for one seeking U.S. citizenship to renounce or repudiate their past citizenship in a foreign country. As for the church, one must always *repent* of their past life of sin (Luke 3:8; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19). This repentance or repudiation of a past life in another kingdom (kingdom of the world) (2 Corinthians 6:17) marks the beginning of the end of a sinful life. The prospective U.S. citizen publicly professes his allegiance to this country. The one seeking to become a Christian undergoes a similar moment when he publicly confesses his belief in Christ Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10; Philippians 2:11; 1 John 4:15). The example was set by the Ethiopian officer in Acts 8:37. Finally, a person seeking citizenship in this country must complete a ceremony of some sort. Such varies greatly but nevertheless marks the moment when one become a citizen. There is no variability when one enters the church. Baptism marks that moment (Acts 2:38; Acts 8:38; Acts 9:18). At that point, having been obedient unto all that God has said, one is added to the church (Acts 2:47).

Claims are irrelevant, obedience is essential. Recently, some who have entered this country illegally were heard to say in protest, "I am a citizen too!" No one seriously entertains their claim. While some may seek to alter the rules and make them a citizen they, at this, are not. Likewise a man may not call himself a Christian while refusing obedience to the Lord's commands. A man may deeply desire to be a Christian, he may call himself a Christian, he may even do good works on behalf of the Kingdom (Matthew 7:21-23) and he may genuinely convince himself of his place in the Kingdom. Yet that man is not a citizen of the Kingdom, not a member of the church, until he obeys all that God has given.

Amnesty is not promised. Some in the United States are suggesting that the government grant amnesty to illegal aliens now in this country. Whether or not that happens remains the topic of controversy and speculation. But in the case of God's kingdom, amnesty has already been granted. All men sin (Romans 3:23) and are worthy of death (Romans 6:23). Yet God has already granted unto us a way to have our sins removed (Isaiah 1:18; Acts 22:16). There is no future amnesty promised or even suggested. Yet there is amnesty here and now. It is called salvation in Christ. Won't you accept his amnesty this hour?

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