

Dear Friends,

This week's Gleanings is a day late due to some medical issues and tests I had this week. I'm recovering well, but still weaker than I'd like to be. I am thankful for your prayers.

Scripture often compares our spiritual life to citizenship and privileges in a civil "Kingdom." On a few occasions, that "Kingdom" symbol appears relative to our eternity in glory with the Lord, but the most frequent appearance of this symbol in Scripture relates to our present conduct as believers in Jesus. In both Philippians 1:27 and Philippians 3:20, Paul used a Greek word that refers to citizenship for the word in our KJV "Conversation." Our "Conversation," our daily routine conduct, including but not limited to our speech, should righteously represent our "Citizenship" in the Kingdom of our God.

In our study passage for this week, Peter teaches us how to live up to that citizenship in our conduct. In the natural world, citizens of a country may leave and return to their country freely by showing the border authorities their "Proof of citizenship." What is our "Proof of citizenship" in the Lord's kingdom? It is the selfless, godly fruitful faith-life which Peter described in the early verses of this letter. If we fail to live by these principles, we cannot "Prove" to ourselves, much less to others, that we are citizens in the Lord's kingdom. But when we live by the truths taught in this chapter, we manifest our true citizenship and, no surprise, are granted the privilege of citizens to enter our homeland and enjoy our "Kingdom" blessings. How is our "Citizenship" going?

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Citizenship in a Noble Kingdom

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10-11 KJV 1900)

Happy New Year! Our culture touts "New Year's resolutions." However, by February 1, most of them are already broken. This habit reveals much about our lack of commitment. If you start with good intentions, in our culture, all is forgiven and forgotten. We need Peter's "...give all diligence" nudge. He didn't write simply "...give diligence," but "...give all diligence." The idea is "Work harder" than you have worked in the past at this task. We normally give diligence to the things that we value most. Ponder your daily conduct. Aside from necessary work or chores for living, what gets your "Juices," your emotions, going most? What compels you to wax verbal in your zeal? Your faith in Jesus? Or your political allegiances? Or your hobbies? We keep track of our spending with a checkbook. If we accept the premise that "Time is money," where do we spend our time-money? In the last week, what ideas commanded the greatest portion of our mental energy? If it was anything other than our faith-life as defined in the New Testament, not in our mind, it reveals

a need to rethink and repent priorities. Yes, we need Peter's teaching to start this year with "...all diligence" to our faith-life.

Peter identified his intended readers as "brethren." He also referred to their "calling and election." They were born-again children of God. This is not a salvation passage, but a discipleship passage. Peter's intended readers are "Brethren," already chosen and already called.

"...to make your calling and election sure." To make something sure is not to create it. God created us "in Christ Jesus" through the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth, affirming our eternal election, and He simultaneously called us to the blessings and privileges of that election. Lou-Nida's New Testament dictionary defines the word translated "sure" as "...pertaining to that which is known with certainty." All the admonitions which Peter included in this chapter to this point have a purpose. First, they enable us to grow a fruitful, God-honoring faith. Secondly, as we ponder the growing impact of these things in our life with "all diligence," our knowledge of our God and His gracious work on our behalf becomes clearer and more confident. We all face seasons when we struggle and doubt, but Peter teaches us how to break those seasons and return to a fruitful faith. In the process, and always secondary to that fruitful faith, our knowledge of our own "calling and election" becomes stronger. Again, this context is not about gaining our eternal salvation or even keeping it but using it to transform our lives to be fruitful and assured in our faith.

"...ye shall never fall." Peter's words stir meditation. Fall from what? Fall into what? Contextually, Peter has already drawn the contrast between our being "barren and unfruitful" and forgetting our salvation with a fruitful and assured faith. Doing what Peter taught in this chapter leads us to that fruitful assured faith. Failure to do what he taught predicts a certain failure, a "falling" from that fruitful assured faith. In this "All about me" culture, even sincere Christian people fall prey to the culture's influence. When this happens, they begin to think of their faith life as "All about me," not about fruitful service to the Lord and His people. Pastors and preachers under this cultural blight will teach that every act of faith and obedience is designed to "Give me assurance of my salvation." Sadly, when believers seek personal gain of any kind, the goal of assurance becomes unattainable. They will never do enough, work hard enough, believe enough to ever arrive at truly assured faith. To put their problem in Peter's words in the passage, they do "fall" and become barren and unfruitful. However, if we turn our minds from the "Me-culture" to Scripture and a godly faith, we learn the truth of Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35b KJV) Our Biblical Christian goal is never to gain anything for self, not even assurance. The amazing mystery of the Lord's dealing with us appears in this truth. Forget self, turn all our heart and labor to adding those key seven qualities to our minds and lifestyle with "Diligence," and the Lord sends a "Blessed assurance" to us as a compliment to our service. Seek assurance, and you'll never find enough. Forget assurance and focus on a fruitful faith, and the Lord blesses you with full assurance of faith.

"For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." In this verse, Peter used Jesus' frequent "Kingdom" symbol, comparing the Lord's teachings and "Administration" of blessings, or chastening to us, depending on our faith-choices or failures. He did not compare the Lord's administration to a democracy in which each citizen gets to vote for or against ideas. The Lord's administration of His spiritual domain is compared to a "Kingdom," a state, or state of mind, governed by one, the King.

In a civil kingdom, who is granted admission into that kingdom? By showing proof of their identity, who is allowed to enter? Only people who are citizens of that kingdom. "Aliens," non-citizens, are denied entry. Living in Southern California just over one hundred miles from the Mexican border, on a few occasions, I've had reason to cross the border. Upon my return, a Border Patrol agent required that I show my driver's license or some other proof of my US citizenship. With that proof, I was freely admitted to return and go my way. Peter applied this simple example to our spiritual conduct and blessings. How do we prove our spiritual "Citizenship" in the Lord's kingdom? Is it not by growing in both our Biblical and our experiential knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the truths and rules of His "Kingdom" as taught in the New Testament? We "Identify" ourselves as citizens in the Lord's kingdom through this knowledge enlarged by the seven "...add to your faith" qualities and behaviors, done with "all diligence." You see, these behaviors do not create our citizenship in the Lord's kingdom. They identify us as being citizens in His kingdom. They become our proof of our identity.

Consider the gravity of the lesson. We, eternally chosen and called children of God, may fail to grow in our spiritual knowledge (Both facets, factual from Scripture and experiential through selfless faith living). We may also fail to add those seven prescribed traits to our faith, and doom ourselves, despite our citizenship, to living outside His kingdom. I'm reminded of an unusual experience I once had at the Mexican border. A church friend and I drove across the border to visit an extremely sick believer who was in a hospital in Tijuana, Mexico. We were allowed to cross over with a simple waive of the Border Patrol. We visited this suffering believer. As we were waiting in line to cross back into our country, my friend whispered, "Oh, no. I left my wallet and my driver's license in my car." We weren't sure what would happen. I showed the Border Patrol agent my driver's license and was waived to enter. My friend flashed an identify card that looked a bit like his driver's license, and, to our relief, was waived to enter. By the look on the agent's face, I strongly suspected he recognized the problem and showed mercy to my friend.

Is our spiritual knowledge and fruitful faith important in the here and now? I strongly urge that we always regard it as of the utmost importance and gravity. How does it impact us? Let me use our study passage and ask the question of you. Faced with a choice of living your life outside this country (Not being allowed to enter it) or living in it with all the blessings and privileges of citizenship, would you consider sound identification of your "Citizenship" to be important? How important would you consider it? For me, it would be of utmost importance. Why think of our spiritual citizenship and "Where we live" differently?

We live in a proud patriotic country, although those qualities are fading. I do not diminish at all my conviction that this country came to exist, despite its beginning in contradiction of New Testament teaching regarding believers submitting respectfully to the civil government under which they live. My personal thought is that it was blessed to gain independence because the ruling government at the time was abusing God's people and usurping its power. I honestly believe the Lord's kind providence blessed our beginning. A word of caution. That our country started so well because of divine providence does not mean we are forever God's favorite country.

Further, this country is not "God's new Israel." The only "New Israel" taught in the New Testament is not a civil government of any kind. It is individual people who have been touched and changed

by divine grace. Paul succinctly defined them (Us) in Romans 2:28-29. Neither is this country God's "New Church." It is a church of no kind whatever. The Lord's church was (In the New Testament) and now a spiritual entity of baptized believers who gather under a common faith (A "fruitful faith") for purposes of worshipping, serving, and glorifying our Lord, and for serving each other in our common united faith. Country worship is not Biblical. It is idolatry, for it replaces God with something else.

Contextually Peter's lesson we've studied recently finds its summary in our study verses. "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you..." teaches us that our "Entrance" in the Lord's "Kingdom" blessings is contingent on our growing this fruitful faith. In effect, our obedience to the New Testament "Faith-way" serves as a spiritual "Border Patrol" screening would-be entrants into those blessings. Our transformed life by these truths opens the gate for our admission to the blessings of the Lord's kingdom. Our failure bars us from those blessings, from entrance into His kingdom.

"...into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." While "everlasting" in Scripture frequently refers to God and to our eternal life with Him, the word also communicates a strong element of quality, not mere quantity of time (Or timelessness to be accurate). In this context of timely teaching, it is my conviction that Peter's use of the word in this verse refers to an "Everlasting" quality of blessings which children of God who grow a fruitful faith enjoy in abundance in the here and now. We begin our "Eternity" with the Lord now, and it grows to full fruition at death and Second Coming.

If children of God can realize this eternal quality of blessings by their fruitful faith in their present life, this truth should be proclaimed with loving grace and conviction from every pulpit. Why should a "Child of the King" live like a homeless person?

These "Kingdom" riches and blessings are available to every born-again person today, right now. But they require something of us. We realize and rejoice in those blessings only to the extent we grow in both aspects of knowledge mentioned above and in a fruitful faith by our living up to those seven behaviors which Peter named.

Have you—or I—arrived at that elevated level of blessings? Not fully. However, they remain available to us if we follow Peter's teaching in this opening lesson of 2 Peter. In a gentle and instructive tone, Peter reminds us. You are a "Child of the King." Live up to who you are. Honor your King and Father on your journey.

Elder Joe Holder