

Citizens & Exiles

Thoughts on Living as God's People in the U.S.A. in 2024

July 7th, 2024

Introduction: Modern America & the Negative World

For much of our nation's history, the cultural environment of the United States has been friendly to the beliefs and ethics of the Christian faith. Although not all people were believers, there was a general recognition of the 'good' of the Christianity. Believers therefore felt a great deal of overlap between their heavenly citizenship as Christians and their earthly citizenship as Americans. That began to change in the post-WWII era, with the prevailing cultural view of the faith shifting from positive to neutral, and finally from neutral to negative.

"...it might be better to say Christianity is viewed suspiciously rather than negatively. Simply identifying as a Christian in this world can still be acceptable in society, though it may generate initial skepticism. But the contents of a person's faith cannot conflict with today's secular culture and ideologies." —Aaron Renn, *Life in the Negative World*

Main Point: A recognition of ourselves as both _____ and _____ helps us to rightly understand how we are to live as God's people in the modern United States..

Initial Considerations

1. To be a believer in Jesus Christ is to have been granted ' _____ ' citizenship.

Eph. 2:19-20—¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

Phil. 3:20-21—²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

2. To be a citizen of heaven is to be an 'exile' in the world, even in the place of our ' _____ ' citizenship.

1 Pet. 1:17-19—¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

1 Pet. 2:11-12—¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Key Point: As dual citizens, we must recognize the primacy our heavenly citizenship and should exhibit the _____ and _____ of our true home even as we live in the place of our earthly citizenship.

"There is a real sense in which Christians, analogous to Israel in exile, are dual citizens—resident aliens. Christians are first and foremost citizens of the redemptive kingdom, but they are also citizens of God's universal common kingdom along with every other human being. And thus, Christians contribute to society, submit to and pray for governmental authorities, and participate in various aspects of cultural endeavors, as long as they reflect and remain consistent with God's law."

—Scott Aniol, *Citizens & Exiles*

Instructions to 'Exiles' — Jeremiah 29:4-7

Context

This is a portion of a letter sent by the prophet Jeremiah to those who had gone into exile following the first siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (597 B.C.). It was addressed to the people, beginning with their political ('elders') and religious ('priests' & 'prophets') leaders. It offered exhortations and practical instructions to exiles who found themselves living in a place that did not share their values as God's people.

Exposition

1. God's people in exile are to remember His sovereign _____.

Jer. 29:4—"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

⇒ Nothing they are experiencing has occurred outside of His _____.

⇒ As the LORD of Hosts, God is powerfully present with His people to _____ them.

We are to continually be reminded of who _____ is a and who _____ are as His people!

2. God's people in exile are to become _____ in the nations in which they live.

Jer. 29:5-6—⁵*Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.* ⁶*Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.*

⇒ They are to own _____ and build _____, making a _____ for themselves and others.

⇒ They are to establish _____ and to have multiple _____ of their descendants in mind.

We are to be a known community that bears faithful witness to the Lord Jesus within the nation, particularly in how we _____ one another!

3. God's people in exile are to seek the ' _____ ' of the places in which they live.

Jer. 29:7—*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

'welfare' — שְׁלוֹם (sha-lôm)—[abstractly] welfare, i.e. health, prosperity, peace.

⇒ They are to engage in various aspects of culture-making and culture-shaping not just for the _____ 'good,' but also for the _____ 'good.'

⇒ They are to pray for God to _____ and to _____ the place in which they have been called to live.

We are to be a community that blesses others as we _____ the Lord Jesus in our vocations and pursue the 'common good!'

"Christian morality is not ultimately instruction in how to make oneself a member of the Christian club. It is not a self-help program whose rules are adopted by a small set of people who wish to better themselves. Christian morals, rather, are simply moral teachings that agree with the natural design of the universe. They are instructions in how to live with the grain of creation. That is a carpentry metaphor, of course, but it makes the point well: When we cut against the grain, we can ruin both our saw and the wood. So it is when we behave in ways that run counter to the moral teachings of Scripture and nature."

—Jake Meador, "Why We Need the Common Good"—Vol. IV, Issue 1 of *Ad Fontes*

Key Point: God intends for His people to _____ & _____ together as we live as His faithful _____.

Concluding Thoughts

- As Christians, we should prioritize the _____ up of our families and our churches.
- As Christians, we should seek to impact our communities for the common good through the establishment of _____ and _____.
- As Christians, we should seek to impact our local, national, and state communities for the common good as we participate in the _____ process.

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Main Point: A recognition of ourselves as both citizens and exiles helps us to rightly understand how we are to live as God's people in the modern United States.

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Key Point: As dual citizens, we must recognize the primacy our heavenly citizenship and should exhibit the culture and values of our true home even as we live in the place of our earthly citizenship.

"There is a real sense in which Christians, analogous to Israel in exile, are dual citizens—resident aliens. Christians are first and foremost citizens of the redemptive kingdom, but they are also citizens of God's universal common kingdom along with every other human being. And thus, Christians contribute to society, submit to and pray for governmental authorities, and participate in various aspects of cultural endeavors, as long as they reflect and remain consistent with God's law."

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⇒ Nothing they are experiencing has occurred outside of His control.

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We are to continually be reminded of who He is a and who we are as His people!

2. God's people in exile are to become established in the nations in which they live.

Jer. 29:5-6—⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.

⇒ They are to own property and build homes, making a living for themselves and others.

⇒ They are to have families and to have multiple generations of their descendants in mind.

We are to be a known community that bears faithful witness to the Lord Jesus within the nation, particularly in how we love one another!

3. God's people in exile are to seek the 'welfare' of the places in which they live.

Jer. 29:7—But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

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⇒ They are to engage in various aspects of culture-making and culture-shaping not just for the private 'good,' but also for the common 'good.'

⇒ They are to pray for God to bless and to prosper the place in which they have been called to live.

We are to be a community that blesses others as we serve the Lord Jesus in our vocations and pursue the 'common good!'

"Christian morality is not ultimately instruction in how to make oneself a member of the Christian club. It is not a self-help program whose rules are adopted by a small set of people who wish to better themselves. Christian morals, rather, are simply moral teachings that agree with the natural design of the universe. They are instructions in how to live with the grain of creation. That is a carpentry metaphor, of course, but it makes the point well: When we cut against the grain, we can ruin both our saw and the wood. So it is when we behave in ways that run counter to the moral teachings of Scripture and nature."

—Jake Meador, "Why We Need the Common Good"—Vol. IV, Issue 1 of *Ad Fontes*

Key Point: God intends for His people to worship & thrive together as we live as His faithful witnesses.

Concluding Thoughts

- As Christians, we should prioritize the building up of our families and our churches.
- As Christians, we should seek to impact our communities for the common good through the establishment or shaping of businesses and institutions.
- As Christians, we should seek to impact our local, national, and state communities for the common good as we participate in the political process.