

Citizenship

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The believer's home is in heaven. It is easy to get caught up in the crosscurrents of gentile politics, for truly *"the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing"* (Psalm 2:1; Acts 4:25).

Paul, the apostle, tells us our true place in the current course of this world when he wrote, *"For our conversation is in heaven."* Interestingly, the word that Paul used for *"conversation"* in Philippians 3:20 was the Greek word *"politeuma."* This is the only time that Paul uses this word, that *Strong's Greek Lexicon #4175* defines as *"a community, i.e., citizenship."* An example of *"politeuma"* being translated according to James Strong's definition can be seen in the following English versions:

"... Our citizenship in the heavens ..." (Rotherham's Emphasized Bible - 1868)

"... Our citizenship is in the heavens ..." (Young's Literal Translation - 1898)

"... Our citizenship is in heaven ..." (KJV 2000)

J.C. O'Hair (1876-1958) wrote the following in his work *Ambassadors of Reconciliation*:

The word *"conversation"* here [in Philippians 3:20] could be translated *"citizenship"* or even *"politics"* ... The citizenship and politics of every representative of Christ is in heaven ... The believer is in the world, but not of the world. Unto him has been committed the Word of reconciliation. To him is given the ministry of reconciliation.

Bill (William) Petri also adds his voice to this discussion in his work *Government, War and the Christian* (2008, p. 11):

The word *"conversation"* in Philippians 3:20 is an interesting word. It is the Greek word *"politeuma"* and means *"the commonwealth of citizens."* It is interesting that in the English language we take our word *politic* from this Greek word.

Others have also shared the meaning of the word *politeuma* and its application to Paul's use to the Body of Christ:

The Greek word for citizenship is “*politeuma*.” “Politics” comes from this word! Christians do have a “political agenda,” but it is not of *this* world. “*Politeuma*” technically can also be translated another way. It can mean a *townsman*. It is correct to say that citizens of men’s governments are townsmen – of particular *towns* on earth.

Do God’s people practice politics? The answer is “Yes” – in a sense! I have an absolutely deep political conviction. Let me say this more clearly, so you can understand. In one sense, Christians are very political in their thinking. Is God a political being? The answer is absolutely, “Yes!” But His politics are not of *this* society. He has His *Own* view of government, His *Own* view of correct and right “*politeuma*,” or politics. His kingdom – His government – “is not of *this* world,” but He *does* have a government.

The word *police* comes from “*politeuma*.” So do *policy* and *poll*. It is not hard to understand how police, policies and polls are connected, in one way or another, to politics. The large American cities of Indianapolis and Minneapolis derive their names from “*politeuma*.” These are large towns with lots of citizens. Minnea(*polis*) means the major city of Minnesota and Indiana(*polis*) means the major city of Indiana. Mystery is often stripped away when words are broken down into their most basic meaning.¹

A Greek city-state was known as a “*polis*.” The original meaning was close to the idea of “town,” but eventually was used to describe the ruling political center of a district or territory. In fact *polis* became a rather complex word to encompass the whole idea of government, and was therefore a more extensive word than merely “town” or “city.” We get the word politics from this word – the art or science of governing a group of people.

A politician is a person engaged in running the affairs of the *polis*; a policy is a reflection of wisdom in governing the *polis*; and police are those who control and regulate the activities of the *polis*. As you can see, this Greek word is foundational to many of our English words related to governmental matters.

In like fashion the Greek word *polis* was used by the Greeks as a basis for many other Greek words related to governmental functions. A “*politarches*” was a civil-magistrate (Acts 17:6, 8); a “*polites*” was a citizen of the state (Acts 21:39); “*politeia*” was the word used for citizenship (Acts 22:28); and “*politeuomai*” was a word to describe how people were to conduct themselves as citizens of the state. Then there was the word we are considering here, “*politeuma*” – a word used to describe the state itself or a commonwealth.²

Thus John Nelson Darby translated Philippians 3:20:

“... *Our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens ...*” (Darby Translation - 1890).

Paul teaches us that as members of Christ’s Body we already have a citizenship, and it is in

1. David C. Pack, *Do Christians Vote?*
2. Dan Hayden, *Truth in Grace*.

heaven. Our government is there; our King is there; our politics are there.

We have been called into His Kingdom:

“That ye would walk worthy of God, Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory”
(I Thessalonians 2:12).

We have been delivered from the earthly kingdoms and translated into His:

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

He is the **only** Potentate (Ruler),³ the King of kings, and Lord of lords:

“... Our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in His times He shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (I Timothy 6:14-15).

3. *“only Ruler”* (Darby Translation, 1890);

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