

Thought for the Day 21st September - John Reed

Read Philippians 3:12-4:1

Have you ever renounced your citizenship?

I didn't realise until I read it this morning that thousands of Americans have renounced their citizenship this year alone. And that number is up – a record 5313 Americans around the world have shredded their passports in the first half of 2020, compared to 2072 last year, and eclipsing the previous record of 5409 in 2016.¹

Why are so many Americans deciding they no longer want to belong to the Land of the Free? Apparently, depending on who you talk to, there are two main reasons: tax and Trump.

The latter I shall not comment on. The former is interesting. Again, I wasn't aware of it until I read this story, that the United States is one of only two countries in the world that taxes its citizens regardless of where in the world they are living. The other is Eritrea (look it up). In 2016, for example, then British foreign secretary (now PM) Boris Johnson renounced his US citizenship (obviously the dual citizenship laws for politicians are different in the UK!) because the US tax department (the IRS) wanted to charge him capital gains tax on the sale of his home in London. Similarly, this article quotes Susan Crosse, who was 21 when she left the US. She married a Brit, and they have lived in Australia since 1986. Explaining why she has now given up her US citizenship, she said: "I'm not living there. I'm not using anything the US government can offer me ... What they're doing is stealing my retirement here in Australia."

The Bible has a great deal to say about God's people and their citizenship.

In Exodus, God somewhat forcibly helped Israel renounce their (involuntary) "citizenship" of Egypt. Because they really belonged elsewhere – in the Promised Land. Later, of course, there was another "exodus" from Babylon, when the exiles came back to Judah and Jerusalem, and each man returned "to his own city" (Ezra 2:1).

In the New Testament, as in this passage in Philippians, we are often told that "our citizenship is in heaven" (v. 20), and we therefore look forward to the day when our Saviour comes and takes us home. We are seeking the city that is to come (Hebrews 13:14), the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). We who once belonged to this world and were strangers and aliens to the people of God (Ephesians 2:12) are now aliens and strangers in this world (1 Peter 2:10) and fellow citizens with the saints of the household of God (Ephesians 2:17).

For that reason, we should forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead (Philippians 3:13), as we long to go home.

¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/tax-and-the-trump-effect-why-so-many-americans-are-renouncing-citizenship-20200911-p55ups.html>