



“GREEN CARD” NOT ACCEPTED

Coming back from Manila last month, we had to go through customs and immigration inspection at the Los Angeles International Airport. There were two lines for inspecting immigration documents: one for visitors or nonresidents (who are required to have a valid visa for entry into the country) and another one for U. S. residents (who don't need a visa). The residents are the U. S. citizens (U. S. passport holders) and permanent resident immigrants (“green card” holders).

If a U. S. citizen has a passport, he will normally have no problem in entering the United States. He is a citizen of this country and he is entitled to come home. The permanent resident immigrant, however, must satisfy certain regulations regarding staying outside of the country before he is admitted. A green card, by itself, will not gain him entry. If he stays outside of the United States too long, he might not be allowed entry. Since he is not a U. S. citizen yet, he does not have the same rights as a citizen.

Rich and powerful countries have very stringent immigration requirements and qualifications for immigration and naturalization. This is especially true of the United States, where millions of foreigners enter and stay without legal and proper immigration documents. They come and stay unlawfully because of the prospect of better jobs, higher pay, greater economic and educational opportunities, and better quality of life than they can have in their home countries.

In the United States, green card holders (permanent residents who go through a long and difficult process of qualification and approval for immigration) do not automatically become citizens. They have to satisfy residency requirements and pre-citizenship examination before they are approved for citizenship. Upon obtaining approval, they must take the oath of citizenship before a magistrate or proper government official. Only after this process will they be issued a Certificate of Naturalization and a U. S. passport.

If you have gone through the process of immigration and naturalization, you value and treasure your U. S. citizenship. You hold your blue passport with pride every time you pull it out to identify yourself as an American national. You have the distinct privilege and honor of belonging to the most powerful nation in the world.

Every nation values and jealously guards its citizenship. It is the most precious gift a nation can give to an alien because it carries

with it certain rights and privileges that non-citizens do not possess. Citizenship validates and legitimizes a nation. So, it is not bestowed or obtained easily.

Citizenship is different from membership, though. Organizations and religions function on membership. Kingdoms and countries operate on citizenship. The Kingdom of Heaven operates on citizenship because it is not a religion, it is the original kingdom, with God as the King. According to the Bible, all of the members of God's family are citizens of His Kingdom (**Eph. 2:19**).

Who belongs to the royal family of God? Those who believe in Jesus Christ and accept Him are given the right to become the children of God (**John 1:12**). They are born of the Spirit and are given a new spirit. This enables them to enter the spiritual realm, where God's Kingdom operates.

All human beings are born as aliens and subjects of a foreign country – the “dominion of darkness” that is ruled by God's enemy. They cannot enter God's Kingdom as long as they are aliens. The strict immigration rules of the Kingdom of Heaven do not allow entry to foreigners. You have to be a citizen of the Kingdom in order to enter. Non-citizens or “green card” holders are not accepted.

According to the King's Son, in order to be a citizen of His Kingdom, you have to be born again (**John 3:3**). You don't acquire citizenship by becoming a member of a religious organization. Nicodemus, a member of the high council of the Jewish religion in Jesus' day, was told that he needed to be born again. Jesus also told him that without this new birth, he could not even “see” the Kingdom. Citizenship in God's Kingdom is in the unseen spiritual realm, not the physical world.

Unlike the naturalization laws of earthly nations, citizenship in God's Kingdom is instant. There is no waiting or qualifying period. You don't become a citizen by going through a long process of qualification. If this were the case, no one would ever qualify. The acceptance standards of Heaven is beyond human reach. But Someone already had qualified for us and satisfied all of the heavenly requirements on our behalf.

Citizenship in the Kingdom is instant because Jesus had already fulfilled the naturalization requirements for us. The Good News is that it gives our Heavenly Father great happiness to give us citizenship in His Kingdom. (**Luke 12:32**). Kingdom citizenship is available to all who desire it.