

A place to call home: citizenship in heaven for Third Culture Kids

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Sydney, Australia

November 2017

Research Project completed as part of the requirements for the Master of Divinity degree
through the Australian College of Theology, supervised by SMBC

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Abstract

In this research project I compare the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) to New Testament theology of citizenship in heaven. I argue that citizenship in heaven provides an important bridge between felt needs of TCKs and biblical truth – an essential tool in clear and effective presentation and application of the gospel to their lives.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of Third Culture Kids, then shares insights from interviews with nine Christian TCKs on the topics of home, belonging, allegiance, and citizenship. Statistics from a survey of 92 Christian TCKs provide additional support.

Chapter 2 investigates the concept of citizenship further, in both modern and biblical usage, with reference to what it meant to be an Israelite in the Old Testament. I consider the imagery of citizenship of heaven which arises in the New Testament, alongside imagery of Christians as sojourners or foreigners on earth.

Chapter 3 pulls these two concepts together, demonstrating the clear overlap between TCKs' emotional connection to concepts of belonging generally, and citizenship specifically, with important themes developed in Christian theology. I explore how TCKs' lived experiences connect to their soteriology, with special reference to justification and sanctification.

I conclude that citizenship in heaven is a powerful tool to enable effective discipleship of TCKs. This concept brings comfort to TCKs in the midst of transition and complex earthly connections, which is valuable in itself. In addition, it connects TCKs' felt needs and lived experiences with truth revealed through Scripture, enabling them to more readily and deeply internalise the truth of the gospel.

Introduction

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) grow up with multiple cultural influences as they balance connection to the country they have a passport from with life as a foreigner elsewhere. This experience creates a unique worldview, in which concepts of home and belonging can stir emotional confusion and conflict. The Christian doctrine of “citizenship in heaven” touches these same themes. For this reason, I set out to investigate how this theology might be understood by, and be applied to, TCKs.

I collected qualitative data through interviews and quantitative data through a survey. My target demographic was young adult TCKs who identify as Christian. I interviewed a diverse group of nine Christian TCKs aged 19-26 about their thoughts and feelings surrounding concepts of home, belonging, allegiance and citizenship, as well as their theology of citizenship in heaven.¹ I then surveyed 92 Christian TCKs aged 16-35 (65% in the 19-25 age bracket), to see if trends observed in the small number of interviews would carry across a wider sampling.²

Despite sharing the demographics of age and faith, these TCKs came from a wide range of backgrounds. Their passport countries include: Australia, Cameroon, Canada, DR Congo, Finland, Germany, Guatemala, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK, USA, and Zambia. They lived overseas for different reasons related to parents’ work or study: 39% mission, 33% international business, 9% NGO/IGO, 9% teachers, 4% students, 4% foreign service, 2% other. 57% lived outside their passport countries for 11-18 years before age 18; 35% for 6-10 years; 8% for 3-5 years.

I bring together quotes and statistics from this research with wide readings in the fields of theology, exegesis, homiletics, missiology, sociology, and pastoral care. I argue that the theology of citizenship in heaven provides an important bridge between felt needs of TCKs and biblical truth. Connection with felt needs is essential for clear and effective communication of information to any target audience. This makes citizenship in heaven an extremely valuable tool in effective presentation and application of the gospel to the lives of TCKs. Anyone who cares pastorally for TCKs should be equipped to understand this theology and how it connects with TCKs.

¹ Introduction to the backgrounds of the interview group is in Appendix A.

² The list of survey questions, and the statistics gathered, are in Appendix B.

Chapter 1 – Third Culture Kids

What is a Third Culture Kid?

‘Third Culture Kid’ (or TCK) is a term which relates to living outside one’s passport country during childhood. Anyone who “spent a significant part of his or her developmental years” in a country of which he or she was not a citizen (nor planning to become a citizen) is considered a TCK.³ The term was coined by social scientists Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem in the 1960s.⁴ They noticed that expatriates formed a “shared lifestyle” distinct from “either their home or their host culture” and named this the “third culture”.⁵ They described the three cultures of a TCK as the parents’ culture, the culture the TCK lives in, and the shared culture of TCKs themselves.⁶

Contrary to popular belief, the three cultures of a TCK are not three places or people groups, but three “categories of influence”.⁷ With increased globalisation has come increasingly multi-layered international experiences, so it is important to expand these categories in order to encompass the diverse range of TCK experiences. A helpful recasting of the three cultures is Legal Culture, Geographic Culture, and Relational Culture.⁸

A Legal Culture is any country in which a person has legal standing: a passport or permanent residency. A Geographic Culture is any culture a person has meaningfully interacted with – cultures lived in and cultures received through familial heritage. According to research I conducted previously, 35% of TCKs have more than one legal culture; 40% have four or more geographic cultures; 10% have six or more.⁹

The ‘Third Culture’ encompasses shared experiences in a Relational Culture. “Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background...growing up in and among many cultures creates an emotional experience and bond that transcends the details.”¹⁰ This is why TCKs “identify more strongly with people who have shared their childhood *experiences* than with those who have merely shared a location”.¹¹

³ David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, 2 ed. (Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009), 13.

⁴ Ruth Hill Useem, “Third Culture Kids: Focus of Major Study,” *Newslinks: Newspaper of the International School Services* 12 (1993): 1.

⁵ Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 14.

⁶ Useem, “Third Culture Kids: Focus of Major Study.”

⁷ Tanya Crossman, *Misunderstood: The Impact of Growing Up Overseas in the 21st Century* (United Kingdom: Summertime Publishing, 2016), 1.

⁸ *Ibid*, *Misunderstood*, 1-3.

⁹ *Ibid*, *Misunderstood*, 2.

¹⁰ Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 13, 18.

¹¹ Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 2.

TCKs grow up with multiple cultural influences, and therefore have a different experience to adult expatriates, who leave home with a sense of identity developed in a culturally stable environment. TCKs grow up “between two or more countries, cultures, languages – even if they live in the one place.”¹²

TCKs are a subset of Cross Cultural Kids (CCKs): “A cross-cultural kid (CCK) is a person who is living or has lived in – or meaningfully interacted with – two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during childhood.”¹³ Other cross-cultural experiences that fall under the CCK umbrella include: immigrant kids, refugee kids, biracial and bicultural kids, and domestic TCKs (children who move multiple times within their passport country).¹⁴

In my previous research, 62% of TCKs said ‘feeling in between’ was a significant part of their childhood experience.¹⁵ For many TCKs it is the Third Culture, something outside lines on a map, that feels like home. “The Third Culture may not inhabit a specific piece of land, but it is home for many TCKs nonetheless.”¹⁶

Home

“Home connotes an emotional place – somewhere you truly belong”.¹⁷ The experience of transience means that for TCKs, ‘home’ is rarely linked to a single physical place. “For most people, personal identity involves identification with a home country – yet the concept of home can be ambiguous and indefinable to TCKs. On one hand, home is the passport country; the place where their parents were raised and where their relatives live. On the other hand, home is the country or countries (or places) where they spent their formative years: where they grew up, went to school, and made their best friends.”¹⁸ Adding multiple Legal and Geographic Cultures to the mix complicates the situation further.

These expatriate families “usually expect at some point to return permanently to live in their home country. Not all do, but that is the general presumption when they first leave their home countries, and this expectation shapes countless decisions along the way”.¹⁹ The family’s ability to stay in a place may be impacted by company policy, visa rules, or other bureaucratic issues. TCKs are therefore caught in between, living “in a place that is not legally their home, regardless of how attached they may feel to it.”²⁰

¹² Ibid, *Misunderstood*, xxv.

¹³ Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 30-31.

¹⁴ Ibid, *Third Culture Kids*, 44-45.

¹⁵ Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 4.

¹⁶ Ibid, *Misunderstood*, 6.

¹⁷ Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 188.

¹⁸ Lois J. Bushong, *Belonging Everywhere & Nowhere: Insights into Counseling the Globally Mobile* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Mango Tree Intercultural Services, 2013), 251.

¹⁹ Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 17.

²⁰ Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 9.

“For TCKs the word home is more of a concept, as opposed to a place.” – Nadia²¹

“Often a TCK’s feeling of home is connected to people rather than to places”.²² Two of the TCKs I interviewed expressed their struggle to understand what it would be like for home to be located in a single place. Eight of the nine clearly identified home as emotional, not physical. The ninth talked about home as a series of places, but still in the context of emotional connections.²³

“Physical location can be important, but the familiarity of a place is more often than not defined by the people and the interactions you have. For me, that is home.” – Lee

Seven identified home as people; six connected this specifically to nuclear family (parents, siblings, spouse, child). Five connected home to a community they belonged to – whether based around a church, workplace, or school.

This was also reflected in the survey. When asked for their primary definition of home, only 16.5% indicated a single place, though 26% agreed that home is “wherever I am currently living”. 34% indicated that home was immediate family, and 11.5% that home was found in other communities (6.5% friends, 5% church). 12% said none of these were home.

Several TCKs talked about home breaking down over time. When the community disperses, so does the feeling of ‘home’. TCKs can feel homesick for a place that no longer exists, or even for a place they have never lived in, depending on where the people they feel connected go.

“I lost my home, where I used to be. I have many places I could have called home, but now there’s no core community there, it simply wouldn’t feel like home anymore.” – Kaito

“To [my passport country peers] home is a familiar place, but to me my family is home. My home is not here, because they’re not here. When I go visit them it’s not really familiar either. I miss places that I’ve never been to, or not been in long. . .My home is literally in three or four countries now, maybe five sometimes.” – Min

²¹ “Nadia” is a pseudonym given to one of the nine TCKs I interviewed. All inset quotes taken from interviews have a pseudonym attached. Appendix A introduces the interviewees and their varied international experiences.

²² Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 258.

²³ She spoke of the small personal effects she takes from place to place, which are important for the stories they hold; it is these emotional connections that make each room she lives in her “home”. She also referenced kitchens as feeling like home, as this is where people interact.

Belonging

TCKs connect not only home but a sense of belonging to “relationship rather than physical place – their life in relationship to an organizational system”.²⁴ This was clear in the survey results. When asked to choose where they most experience belonging, 49% said with family and 31% in an international/multicultural environment. Only 3% identified a country as their primary place of belonging. When allowed to choose multiple options, a third chose their passport country and a third chose another country – but these were the lowest numbers. 61% said in an international/multicultural environment, 56% with friends, 48% with family, and 40% at church.

Four of the TCKs I interviewed connected belonging to community, with three of them specifying Christian community. Five said that belonging comes with shared interests. Three said it comes from people who accept them, and particularly, people who understand or accept their differences.

“I always say where I belong is in my family, or amongst a group of people whom I can connect with, or a group of people who understand my background or understand where I’m coming from or why I think a certain way or why I have certain habits.” – Nadia

“For me belonging has been with people who understand me.” – Gabriel

“I don’t use the word ‘home’ anymore, but I use the word ‘family’ a lot. And I don’t mean immediate family, but including friends and family, and essentially the family of God. That is where my sense of belonging is. . . It is with my church family that I feel like I belong, I have a part to play, I’m part of the body of Christ, and that is my way of belonging and acceptance as well.” – Lee

One thread connecting a lot of their comments was the idea that belonging requires more than common characteristics – not just sharing an ethnicity, a nationality, a job, a church. There needs to be some sort of integration, that they both give (contribute) and receive (be accepted and understood). Four said that to really belong in a group there had to be some sort of shared work – contributing to a shared goal. One said that not understanding how things work prevents the development of a sense of belonging.

“It’s always a two-way thing, to feel like you belong. You can’t just be there and feel like you’re contributing but no one really accepts you, or feel like everyone accepts you but you’re not actually building anything while you’re there.” – Min

²⁴ Bushong, *Belonging Everywhere & Nowhere*, 108.

Patriotism: allegiance and appreciation

Patriotism is often understood as allegiance to one country over and above all others. This makes sense when a person is connected both legally and emotionally to a single country, but TCKs have connections to multiple countries. As TCKs lack a central sense of belonging to a single place, singular allegiance can present difficulties.

The TCKs I interviewed described patriotism as love for, appreciation of, or pride in one's country, but did not identify with extreme patriotism.²⁵ (Only 16% of TCKs surveyed defined patriotism as allegiance to one country; 51% preferred the terminology of appreciation.)

Three connected patriotism with fighting. One, because he completed compulsory military service; the other two saw patriotism as more than just pride in one's country, but insisting that one's country is better than the rest, to the point of arguing with others or even dying for one's country.

“The simplest form of patriotism is loving your country, and showing that love, that's being a patriot. Then the deeper sense of it is dying for your country. Or thinking that it's the best, and it's perfect. That's patriotism.” – Alexis

“I would say patriotism is something not worth having. . . Be proud of your country, but don't have patriotism. . . patriotism is fighting for something.” – Gabriel

Six of the nine TCKs I interviewed said they are not patriotic. Two of the six, and two others, said they feel patriotic toward multiple countries.²⁶ Only one of the nine said he considers himself a patriot. For him, patriotism was connected not only to love of but also to contribution toward the country – connecting to TCKs' thoughts on belonging.

“I think patriotism is when you don't just love your country but you...have a contribution to it, in the short term and in the long term. Because you're contributing to the wellness of your country so you're also emotionally invested in it...I think I'm really a patriot, because my dream is to find different ways to enhance the economy of the country. . . So I consider myself very, not extremely, but very patriotic.” – Bellande

24% of TCKs surveyed said they were not patriotic, with 10% saying patriotism was a “negative/unhelpful sentiment”. 18% said they were patriotic to one country, and 41% said they were patriotic to multiple countries. Interestingly, only 31% agreed with a definition of patriotism that embraced multiple countries; there may be a gap between how they define patriotism and how they experience it.

²⁵ Eight of the nine TCKs I interviewed specifically mentioned Americans when discussing patriotism. They saw American nationalistic pride as the most extreme version of patriotism – a “hard core love or obsession”.

²⁶ For further examples of patriotism to multiple countries, see Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 261.

Citizenship

TCKs' complicated connections to country also affect their views on citizenship. The responses from my interviews fell into two distinct categories. The first: that citizenship is merely a matter of paperwork. You are a citizen of the country that issues your passport, and there is no further meaning to it. The second idea was that citizenship concerns personal involvement – shared values, understanding of culture/language, acceptance by locals, and contribution to the community.

“It’s a very government, bureaucratic word. You’re a citizen when the government says you’re a citizen, when you have the passport, the piece of paper that allows you to be there, that allows you to access the rights of everyone else in the country and it’s protected in law. . .it’s a very clinical thing.” – Hayley

“It just means I hold a passport. . .I could equally say I’m Tanzanian or Cambodian but I’m not entitled to say that. The fact that I have a Cameroonian passport gives me this title.” – Nadia

While four of the nine TCKs initially identified citizenship strictly in terms of passport, three later added the need for personal involvement. Three others identified citizenship as understanding the culture and speaking the language, but two of those three also later said the passport is important. One TCK said citizenship was about contributing to the country; the last said citizenship was primarily about where one lives (whether as a local or foreigner, whether contributing or not).

“It’s purely legal. It’s strictly a legal term. When I think citizenship I just think of where your passport is. . . I can see that citizenship means being a part of your country in some way, or helping lead it to a good direction. . .I just have to think of it in a really simple way. It’s just logistics. If you live there and you’re ‘supposed’ to be there, so you’re not an ‘alien,’ then you’re a citizen.” – Alexis

65% of TCKs surveyed saw a passport as the primary definition of citizenship, with 14% citing residence, 13% contribution to society, and 7% understanding of language and culture. When allowed to choose multiple options, the same number chose the passport, but the other responses jumped – 47% residence, 45% cultural connection, 41% contribution, 30% language.

TCKs see two aspects of citizenship – legal recognition and personal involvement. Most believe both are needed in order to both feel one is a citizen and also be recognised by others as a citizen. The passport declares one to be a citizen, but it is the other connections that create the identity of a citizen.

“You can quite easily be a citizen of a country without knowing any kind of cultural norms or history or the language even. . .citizenship, legally speaking, comes just like

that with paperwork, but in terms of actual action it takes time, it takes years to really feel like you have become a citizen of that place. . .If you don't have the piece of paper to prove it then you're not a citizen of the place. Regardless to how much that person knows about that place or how much they are familiar with the place.” – Kaito

Summary

The international lives of TCKs lead to a sense of home and belonging that is rooted in people rather than in places. TCKs are familiar with the sensation of otherness: living as foreigners in childhood homes, or feeling foreign in countries they are legally attached to. This disconnect transfers to their understanding of citizenship. TCKs see two sides to citizenship: legal recognition (passport), and personal involvement (residence, contribution, and cultural connection).

The next chapter will concentrate on the biblical picture of citizenship; the third chapter will overlay the two, looking for points of connection between TCKs' experiences and the biblical narrative.

Chapter 2 – Citizens of heaven

Citizenship

Citizenship is an identity marker: part of how I see myself and how I am seen by others. It is not merely practical but holds emotional resonance, and is “basic to our creaturely existence as embodied, located and relational beings.”²⁷

The English word ‘citizen’ derives from the Latin *civitas*, referring to “a collective body of equal members in polity of a given (national) boundary.”²⁸ Citizenship in the modern era continues to hold a political aspect; it is a form of belonging granted by a political entity (the nation state).²⁹ Speaking about refugees, Ryan notes that “there is a presumption that the locus of political identity is the state. The state confers citizenship to individuals, whose legal and civic identity is defined accordingly.”³⁰

Citizenship includes “civic responsibilities and duties required to be carried out in a given society.”³¹ Definitions of ‘citizen’ in the Macquarie Dictionary mostly fall into two categories. The first describes “a member, native or naturalised, of a state or nation... owing allegiance to a government and entitled to its protection”; the second concerns residency of a place, especially for one “entitled to its privileges”.³²

Citizenship is not something a person can unilaterally choose; the state must also choose the individual. The state can even confer citizenship on an individual without their involvement. This was recently demonstrated in the Australian federal parliament. Five sitting members of the house and senate were stripped of their positions when the high court ruled they were dual citizens at the time of their election, and therefore ineligible to be elected.³³ Several of these politicians had unknowingly received citizenship by descent despite being born in Australia and never having held any other passport.³⁴

²⁷ Paul S. Williams, “Foreword,” in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, eds. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 9.

²⁸ Mohammed Girma, “Citizenship: A Christian Conception,” in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, eds. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 23.

²⁹ Ben Ryan, “Citizens, Migrants and States,” in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, eds. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 121.

³⁰ Ibid, “Citizens, Migrants and States,” 133.

³¹ Cristian Romocea, “Introduction,” in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, eds. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 14.

³² *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 2nd revised ed. (NSW: Macquarie Library, 1987), 346.

³³ Paul Karp, *High court citizenship case: Barnaby Joyce and four others ruled ineligible* (The Guardian, 2017 [cited November 4 2017]); available from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/oct/27/high-court-rules-barnaby-joyce-and-four-others-ineligible-in-dual-citizenship-case>.

³⁴ Amy Remeikis and Paul Karp, *Dual-citizenship high court ruling: the stakes of the case – explainer* (The Guardian, 2017 [cited November 4 2017]); available from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/oct/10/dual-citizenship-high-court-ruling-the-stakes-of-the-case-explainer>.

Citizenship in the Bible

In the Old Testament, to be an Israelite meant connection to a religion, a political nation, and a physical country. Israel's politics had a religious dimension, and its religion was also political.³⁵ To belong to the people of God meant to belong to an earthly nation. Faith, nationhood, geography – all were connected.

The New Testament also uses imagery of nationhood to describe God's people, but while embracing a broader spiritual reality rather than a particular piece of earthly geography. Indeed, "one of the main points on which early Christianity differentiated itself from Judaism was precisely its transnational character".³⁶ In Jesus, all peoples are invited to join the kingdom, and family, of God. This does not make a faith-nation-geography connection obsolete. Instead, Israel serves as a picture of the deeper spiritual reality which New Testament writers began to unpack in the shadow of the cross.

The concept of Christians as citizens appears several times in the New Testament. Paul uses it in Ephesians and Philippians. Peter uses it in his first letter. The author of Hebrews also employs similar imagery. This imagery was later used by various early church fathers.³⁷

The biblical metaphor of citizenship is often assumed to relate specifically to Roman citizenship. Paul himself was a dual citizen: a Roman citizen and also a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 21:29, 22:25-29).³⁸ Philippi and Ephesus were both cities with a strong connection to Rome, and Roman citizenship. Philippi was particularly Romanised, and "held the unique status of being a colony of the Roman Empire, a source of pride but also of potential conflict for the Christians living there".³⁹ Paul could reasonably expect his readers "to interpret his metaphor in the light of local facts."⁴⁰ While not all were Roman citizens, citizenship was a concrete reality in their lives, not an abstract concept.⁴¹

Another suggestion is that the metaphor relates primarily to Greek citizenship. The problem is that in this system citizens were both "subjects of the authority of the city-state and the creators of it".⁴² This does not fit the biblical picture of creatures under the authority of a Creator.

³⁵ W. Brueggemann, "Scripture: Old Testament," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. P. Scott and W. T. Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 9.

³⁶ Nigel Biggar, "The Bible, Christianity and Patriotism," in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, eds. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 59.

³⁷ Gordon Zerbe, "Discipleship as Citizenship," *Canadian Mennonite* 17 (2013): 4.

³⁸ Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic Books, 1984), 63.

³⁹ Borggren, "Paul's call to true citizenship and to gaman," *The Covenant Quarterly* 73 (2015): 34.

⁴⁰ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 60. See also N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 111.

⁴¹ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 133.

⁴² Girma, "Citizenship," 25.

Different understandings of citizenship can interpret the metaphor, and this may well be the intent. Citizenship was generally understood throughout the ancient world.⁴³ Lyall argues “we can be certain that some role is played by Jewish law and some by Roman law in the selection and interpretation of these metaphors”.⁴⁴ The rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship may differ from one society to another, but the basic concept (which is not expanded on in biblical references) carries across Roman, Greek, Latin, and even modern understandings of citizenship. The New Testament may not contain “a clear conceptual articulation of the notion” but there are certainly several strong themes.⁴⁵

Christians as fellow citizens of one kingdom

In Ephesians Paul uses citizenship to describe the combined people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, as one unity. He describes the Gentiles as “no longer strangers [ξένοι] and aliens [πάροικοι]” but instead “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

The Greek words ξένος (*xenos*) and πάροικος (*paroikos*) are similar but have an important difference. *Xenoi* are foreigners – “people outside a country or community, with no special rights or privileges”.⁴⁶ Not a resident, but a “mere passing stranger”.⁴⁷ On the other hand, a *paroikos* is “a resident foreigner” – in effect, an expatriate.⁴⁸ *Paroikoi* “were like aliens with an ‘immigrant visa,’ which granted them limited rights and privileges, but not full citizenship or permanent residency.”⁴⁹

Paul wrote of the creation of a new people transcending divisions. “Christian citizenship is transnational and universal in character, forming bonds that extend outside and beyond those of the territorial state.”⁵⁰ Revelation illustrates this inclusion in striking fashion, describing people from every earthly place and people gathered together in united worship of Jesus (Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-10).

⁴³ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 49.

⁴⁵ Romocea, “Introduction,” 15.

⁴⁶ Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 171. Also see Bauer, describing *xenos* as visitor rather than resident. Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 684.

⁴⁷ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 496.

⁴⁸ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 779.

⁴⁹ Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 171.

⁵⁰ Williams, “Foreword,” 10.

Christians as expatriates on earth

Peter also uses *paroikos* alongside *παρεπίδημος* (*parepidēmos*), referring to “staying for a while in a strange or foreign place,” also reminiscent of modern expatriates.⁵¹ He applies these words to all Christians: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners [πάροικοι] and exiles [παρεπίδημους] to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). His message is that to be a believer is to live as an expatriate on earth, citizens of another place who hold to that identity. “As pilgrims living and worshiping in the ‘boundary epoch’ between the two advents of Jesus Christ, Christians experience the strangeness of ecclesial existence: they are truly “sojourners and strangers” in the here and now.”⁵² Peter also calls the people of God “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9); Christians may be expatriates in the world, but they are also one people.⁵³

Paul’s message in Philippians 3:20 is similar. He writes that “our citizenship is in heaven,” explaining that believers ought act differently to unbelievers. This is the only New Testament use of the word *πολιτευμα* (*politeuma*), translated “citizenship”. *Politeuma* may relate to a “colony” (Philippi’s unique status) or perhaps a “commonwealth”.⁵⁴ It refers to a ruling body “and by extension to the ‘political identity’ and ‘citizenship’ of those who place their hope in that regime”.⁵⁵ It is related to *πολιτευεσθαι* (*politeuesthai*), which Paul used in Philippians 1:27 in reference to “responsibility as members of a community. So here, if their citizenship is in heaven, their way of life should be in keeping with that citizenship”.⁵⁶ Christians live on earth, but really belong to a different kingdom altogether – and should act accordingly.

This theology of citizenship also connects to Paul’s imagery of being “ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Ephesians 6:19-20).⁵⁷ Christians are representatives of the heavenly kingdom while living in earthly countries.

The author of Hebrews also uses *xenos* and *parepidēmos* to describe Christians. Hebrews 11:13-16 is a particularly poignant description of “human existence as a transient life on earth in anticipation of a transcendent homeland.”⁵⁸ Having listed many Israelite ancestors of faith, the writer continues:

⁵¹ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 775. See also: Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 493.

⁵² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 154.

⁵³ Lyall suggests that “Paul, the citizen, speaks of citizenship. The other writers, aliens, speak of alienage”. This seems a little too arbitrary, as Paul also speaks of alienation and the other writers also use nation language. Dunning critiques this “direct link,” calling it “historically unsustainable”. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 47; Benjamin Dunning, “Strangers and aliens no longer: negotiating identity and difference in Ephesians 2,” 99 (2006): 5.

⁵⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 378.

⁵⁵ Zerbe, “Discipleship as Citizenship,” 7.

⁵⁶ Bruce, *Philippians*, 133

⁵⁷ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 64.

⁵⁸ James W. Thompson, “Strangers on the earth’: philosophical perspective on the promise in Hebrews,” *Restoration Quarterly* 57 (2015): 210.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Again, there is a sense of identity rooted in the Christian's 'real' home country – a place not seen and yet aligned with – for “the true habitable world is not the world as it is presently”.⁵⁹ “Christians are not (or should not be) really at home in this world, for they look for another.”⁶⁰

The imagery “offers a new way of seeing” to those who feel out of place on earth.⁶¹ Thompson connects this to the Old Testament, whose “defining narratives...involve the theme of the existence of Israel in a foreign land: the exodus from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, and the exile...Both I Peter and Hebrews follow this tradition, giving a positive interpretation to the patriarchs' existence as strangers and aliens”.⁶²

Allegiance

There is a sense in which a nation only exists by excluding land and people who do not belong to it.⁶³ New Testament pictures of citizenship in heaven contain a sense of dualism, which portrays “two diverse groups of citizens” – those whose allegiance is to Christ, and those who oppose him.⁶⁴

This raises an important question: can Christians be thought of as dual citizens – citizens of both heaven and earth? Or is this a divided allegiance to be avoided? The answer seems to be both yes and no. The dualism of heavenly vs earthly kingdoms says no, for “no one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). The Australian politicians mentioned earlier were removed from their positions because the Australian constitution disqualifies anyone who “is under any acknowledgment of allegiance, obedience, or adherence to a foreign power, or is a subject or a citizen or entitled to the rights or privileges of a subject or a citizen of a foreign

⁵⁹ Richard Bauckham et al., *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 35.

⁶⁰ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 48.

⁶¹ Thompson, “Strangers on the earth,” 212.

⁶² Ibid, “Strangers on the earth,” 205, 206.

⁶³ “Nations are fundamentally constituted by national consciousness, by a sense of national identity, by the feeling of individuals that they belong to this people. And such a sense of community is usually born in reaction against another people, who are culturally different and whose difference grates or threatens: I belong to this people because I oppose that one.” Biggar, “The Bible, Christianity and Patriotism,” 50-51.

⁶⁴ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 92.

power”.⁶⁵ The requirement is that those who serve at a federal level have allegiance to Australia only, that their decisions not be influenced by outside powers. In the same way, Christians are not to have divided loyalties.

“My idea and understanding of patriotism is quite extreme in that I’ve seen it tangibly manifest within an army and military context. . . I think that military [service] requires an unswerving loyalty to one country. I think you can actually be patriotic to different countries. For me, though, I don’t hold any patriotism to any country. I think that ties into the fact that I consider myself a citizen of heaven. That is my citizenship. That will remain true and unchanging regardless of what the earthly situation may look like.” – Lee

On the other hand, there is biblical teaching on being good citizens of earthly nations (Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1-2). Heavenly allegiance is not an anti-nation position, but rather sets the believer against an invisible kingdom with different values and expectations, standing in opposition to the heavenly kingdom (Ephesians 6:10-12). Our allegiance must be to one kingdom or the other – we cannot serve both. “Though allegiance is not a common way to describe Christian faith, it is an accurate account. To confess that Jesus is Lord means to assert allegiance to a Messiah – an anointed king – who claims dominion over all aspects of life.”⁶⁶

Augustine was influential in describing this distinction between what he called the city of God and the earthly city.⁶⁷ These ‘cities’ represented “two opposing ways of life rather than two actual geographical areas”.⁶⁸ He described stark differences between these two ways of living, while approving earthly engagement.⁶⁹ One may live out heavenly citizenship within an earthly context.

Parrent argues that Christians are dual citizens, “both of a heavenly city and an earthly city: the two, though distinct, are inextricably intertwined.”⁷⁰ While I agree both citizenships ought be exercised, earthly citizenships are inferior to heavenly citizenship. A citizen of heaven follows the values of the kingdom of heaven; this may put him in favour with earthly authorities at one point, and in opposition to them at another. “Christians worship a

⁶⁵ Ian Holland, *Section 44 of the Constitution* (Parliament of Australia, 2004 [cited November 4 2017]); available from

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/Section44.

⁶⁶ C.A. Strine, “Migration, Dual Identity and Integration: A Christian Approach to Embracing Others Across Enduring Lines of Difference,” in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, eds. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 113-114.

⁶⁷ Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1999), 54-55, 160.

⁶⁸ Girma, “Citizenship,” 35-36.

⁶⁹ Girma methodically works through what it means for Christians to engage with the nation state, arguing for “critical engagement.” Ibid, “Citizenship,” 40.

⁷⁰ Parrent, “Dual citizens, not resident aliens,” 46.

transcendent God “beyond” culture. At the same time the church is called to worship God and live faithfully within a particular culture.”⁷¹

Christians as citizens

Bringing this all together, it becomes clear that “the very nature of Christian identity necessitates straddling lines of enduring difference and integrating into an unfamiliar and essentially temporary home”⁷² While the Christian’s enduring allegiance is to the heavenly kingdom, its values and its ruler, in order to live out those values Christians must live peacefully in earthly kingdoms (Romans 12:18).

Biggar writes that Christians cannot rightly love a person more, or less, based on ethnicity or earthly citizenship because each is created and loved by God. Yet he argues it is natural to “feel special affection for, loyalty toward, and gratitude to those communities, customs, and institutions that have benefitted her by inducting her into human goods”.⁷³ That is, the Christian may rightly feel affection toward earthly connections; we may hold multiple affections, but allegiance must be given solely to the heavenly king.

Henson’s distinction between patriotism and nationalism is helpful here: “Patriotism pictures humanity as a composite of many distinctive national types, enriched with the various achievements of history. Nationalism dreams of a subject world, an empire of its own wherein all men serve its interests and minister to its magnificence.”⁷⁴ The Christian may be ‘patriotic’ in this sense toward multiple distinct cultural ‘types’, but allegiance to the kingdom of heaven is stronger.

Friesen powerfully captures this tension, writing: “We are in the world to the core – earthy creatures who belong to families, cities, countries; who share the language, the mores and customs of the culture into which we are born. Yet our lives are shaped by stories and metaphors not shared by the wider culture. We are in tension with the mores and customs of our dominant culture because we also belong to an alternative culture the people of God, a society not identical with family or citizenship.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Duane K. Friesen, “Singing God’s Song as Citizens and Aliens: A Christian Theology of Culture,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (1997): 285.

⁷² Strine, “Migration, Dual Identity and Integration,” 114.

⁷³ Biggar, “The Bible, Christianity and Patriotism,” 48-49.

⁷⁴ H Henson, *Christian Morality: Natural, Developing, Final, Gifford Lectures 1935-36* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 269. One of the TCKs I interviewed also spent time discussing the difference between patriotism and nationalism, and her concern when the two are confused.

⁷⁵ Friesen, “Singing God’s Song as Citizens and Aliens,” 285.

Summary

Citizenship is an identity with accompanying rights, privileges and responsibilities, conferred upon an individual by a governing authority. It is both geographic (linked to place) and community-based (linked to cultural engagement). The New Testament uses this imagery in a general sense (although coloured by first-century understandings of citizenship) which is still readily understood by modern citizens.

New Testament references to citizenship, and related concepts, fall into two categories. The first (in Ephesians and Revelation) paints a picture of God's kingdom transcending earthly boundaries – one people drawn from all the different groups humanity is divided into on earth. The other (in 1 Peter, Philippians, and Hebrews) speaks of Christians as foreigners on earth – expatriates whose true citizenship is in God's kingdom.

The two images work together: people from diverse backgrounds become one through unity in Christ; at the same time their identification with Christ separates them out from all other peoples of the earth. This separation challenges Christians to live peacefully in earthly nations while preserving allegiance to Jesus as their one true ruling authority.

These are concepts which, as demonstrated in chapter 1, resonate with TCKs. Chapter 3 will investigate this emotional overlap, looking into TCKs' thoughts on citizenship in heaven. Felt needs are an important part of effective communication, so thought will be given to how this overlap might be used to effectively disciple TCKs.

Chapter 3 – The impact of citizenship in heaven on TCKs

TCK reactions to citizenship in heaven

TCKs do not experience home, belonging and allegiance as connected to a single concrete place or community, so they resonate with the New Testament concept of being foreigners on earth. This is not an abstract theology to them: it reflects their lived reality. 77% of TCKs surveyed identified with the feeling of being foreign on earth, saying they either often (42%) or sometimes (35%) feel this way.

Most TCKs I interviewed and surveyed responded strongly to the concept of heavenly citizenship built up through the New Testament. None of those surveyed were “ambivalent” about the concept, and only 10% were “unsure”. 80% said the idea was “comforting”; 56% said it was “inspiring,” that they “want to see communities that cross divides”. 29% said it would be great “not having to choose between the countries I love” and 20% said that while they “don’t believe in exclusive allegiance on earth” they could accept “allegiance to a greater reality”. 10% said they felt relief, because “I didn’t know such a place was possible”.

Many TCKs lack an integrated sense of home, and feel this as a loss. “I love the way I grew up, but feel a void (I’d be willing to call it a wound, even) of not having a place to call home”⁷⁶ Seven of the nine TCKs I interviewed expressed a sense of comfort, some for the first time, at the idea that heaven was a single place they could call home, and belong in, forever.

“As a TCK or someone who is searching for their home or where they belong, having concepts like citizenship in heaven help us, or give us hope that one day we will belong somewhere.” – Nadia

“[Being a citizen of heaven] is calming... It gives validation to the fact that I don’t feel at home. Heaven is my home so it’s okay that I’m so confused about where my home is, because maybe there isn’t one here, there’s one there. It’s a huge relief. If you don’t feel like you’re at home, that’s okay, because God is your home. For me people is my home, that’s my automatic – where’s home? It’s love. It’s where my husband is, and my kid. So, that easily transfers over.” – Alexis

Three TCKs made a connection between earthly patriotism and a sense of allegiance to the kingdom of heaven. All found themselves surprised to be using the word “allegiance” as they objected to it in the context of earthly patriotism.

“I come at [citizenship in heaven] from a different point of view than others. I see it more as your identity and your allegiance – I really hate that word, allegiance, but it’s

⁷⁶ 24 year old TCK Logan as quoted in: Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 329.

the one I'm going to use – being in something that's larger. . . I guess the term for me is trying to encapsulate an identity in Christ and in the gospel... we do have a responsibility to something much greater than the nation state.” – Hayley

Several TCK I interviewed picked up on the idea of heaven as a place which embraces people of all cultures. This is especially comforting to the 62% of TCKs who feel at home in international or multicultural communities.⁷⁷

“For me it's a good thing, to know that I belong somewhere that I've never been to. And that I have the description of it and everything and how it will be – the gates, and the streets and everything. Having that picture and knowing that I belong there, even though I've never been there – I like that idea. . . For [TCKs] the idea of being in one place forever and not having to worry about language and not having to have to worry about being understood – that's something big for TCKs. . .I've never been there, I don't know how it is there, but I know I belong there.” – Gabriel

The kingdom of heaven as an answer to TCKs' felt needs

Citizenship in heaven is a theological image that connects TCKs' lived experiences with gospel truth. It tells Christians that we do not belong here. We are awaiting another place – a place where all those who have been scattered will be gathered, where the lines that divided us are erased, where we are home forever. This should be a joy to all believers, but for TCKs it strikes a deep emotional cord, and offers an answer to the longing they know, and grieve, can never be fulfilled on this earth. They may struggle to feel at home, to feel belonging, anywhere on earth – but heaven is the place where they truly belong.

“I believe that there is life after death, that there's a new heaven and a new earth and new creation, that will be my eternal home... I have seen firsthand how earthly loyalties and oaths and covenants and citizenship issues are fickle... People renounce or relinquish or take up these citizenships. I'm not saying that is bad, it just proves that this whole concept of citizenship, earthly citizenship, is a fickle one. Whereas citizenship in heaven for me is, okay, I belong. I belong.” – Lee

“Currently I'm a citizen of Singapore, that may change, but the constant of being a citizen of heaven is always reassuring to have. . . it means once I'm done with my time here I'm off to somewhere else, and that somewhere else is heaven. I belong there, I'm going to where actually my home is. . .It's an overwhelming thought, especially as someone who doesn't really have a home to go back to every time. It's nice to know that in the future, in the long term, in the prospect of eternity, I actually do have somewhere I do belong.” – Min

⁷⁷ Statistic on TCKs who feel they belong in an international/multicultural setting, from Chapter 1, 'Belonging'.

The New Testament affirms that Christians' primary source of belonging is spiritual, connected to a different reality, which we have never seen or touched. This may seem abstract, yet many TCKs experience connection to places they have not visited. Concrete hope in a place of belonging that transcends earthly borders and supersedes earthly allegiances can provide comfort.

Citizenship and soteriology

During interviews I noticed an interesting trend: every TCKs used ideas from their understanding of earthly citizenship to illustrate heavenly citizenship, often in the exact same words. One used the language of language and culture; another repeated her definition of belonging. In itself, this is logical and unremarkable. What is interesting is that the two categories they used to define citizenship carried over into their thoughts on what it means to be part of the people of God – and thus the nature of salvation. Their concepts of citizenship interacted with their soteriology.⁷⁸

The distinction between their two concepts of citizenship – legal recognition and personal involvement – played out along the lines of justification and sanctification. I did not intend to discuss soteriology; I asked no questions about it and the TCKs did not specifically address it. The parallels were clear nonetheless.

“Citizenship in heaven... it’s kind of something you gain through your relationship with God, but also something that can be taken away if you fall away from God, or the ultimate sin, whatever that is... Citizenship to heaven means that you’re a part of heaven and that’s where you’ll go.” – Alexis

“You are guaranteed God’s presence in the future. . .Having citizenship in heaven means you have a ticket, you have a way, you have a path that you can take to be in God’s presence... the condition or the criteria is Christ.” – Kaito

Justification is “a pronouncement made concerning the status of a person’s relationship to a particular legal standard.”⁷⁹ TCKs’ understanding of a passport as legal standing, regardless of behaviour, reflects the doctrine of justification as a “legal declaration by God” which acts in the same way as a passport – guaranteeing access to heaven “on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness”.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ There were also connections to ecclesiology and eschatology, but here I will only explore the soteriological connections.

⁷⁹ Andrew V. Snider, “Sanctification and justification: a unity of distinctions,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 21 (2010): 165.

⁸⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 723, 727.

Four TCKs I interviewed felt uncomfortable identifying as citizens of heaven because they did not feel they were good enough – that they could not live up to the standards of heaven. The analogy of a passport may help these TCKs internalise justification by faith. The doctrine of justification is what establishes assurance of salvation, for it is not by merit but rather a “declarative action of God, like that of a judge in acquitting the accused.”⁸¹

“Do I identify with it? I would love to, I just more and more realise that I’m not that superb as I always thought myself. I’m still trying to figure out what it means to really follow Jesus. . . I would love to be a good citizen, I just don’t feel like it. I feel like I have a lot to learn. I feel like there’s a lot that I don’t understand or know yet, but I would like to develop that.” – Yannick

“I kind of thought that to be a citizen in heaven, you would have to meet some sort of requirement. What qualities would you have to have to become a citizen of heaven, or what would we have to do to acquire citizenship in heaven?” – Nadia

Many TCKs feel strongly that a passport alone is not enough for a person to be recognised as a ‘true’ citizen. This earthly understanding leads naturally to the doctrine of sanctification – that while we are justified by faith in Christ, we also develop identification with his kingdom over time by the way we live. Justification is an act; sanctification is “a process that continues throughout our Christian lives”.⁸² Those who are justified also strive to behave in a way that aligns with the kingdom they are citizens of, even though they fail to entirely live up to “the high standards established for them by Scripture”.⁸³

“We are like representatives of the kingdom of heaven. And we should live like citizens of heaven here on earth. . . For me it means to have a different mindset, a different set of values. . . You live here how you live when you are a citizen in heaven. You care for other people, you think that every human is equal, you respect each other. You live in a responsible way, as a citizen.” – Yannick

TCKs have lived as representatives on earth, as foreigners in places they love but know are not truly theirs. This earthly understanding carries over easily to talking about how to live on earth as citizens of heaven.

“I have to keep my behaviour in check, as someone who is not really a resident here on earth, this world is not my home, I’m just passing through, I have to behave the way that is right for someone representing heaven.” – Min

“I would say the same thing as to the normal citizen. . . knowing how it works, and acting like it. I guess the considered piece of paper would be the Bible. . . You can’t go

⁸¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013), 885.

⁸² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 748.

⁸³ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 155.

to heaven and understand the place, but try to understand through the Bible and by praying and knowing God's heart. Living it out. Because Jesus came here and served as a role model, like someone we can look to and know how to live. Because he's a citizen of heaven, who came to earth and lived here. So I guess look at him, and live like him." – Gabriel

Felt need as an essential tool in effective communication

The purpose of Christian ministry "is more than to unveil Christ; it is so to unveil him that people are drawn to come to him and to receive him".⁸⁴ Christian ministry must communicate far more than information. Information may satisfy curiosity, but "curiosity as a strong motivation comes only after physical and social-dependency needs have been met."⁸⁵ To communicate truth effectively, communicators must connect with felt needs of their audiences. Information that meets felt needs results in more learning, and faster and more permanent changes in opinions, than information that is first presented and then applied.⁸⁶

Hile argues any demonstration of a felt need "met by Jesus will certainly be considered 'good news'" and therefore "messages directed toward man's felt needs can and should be considered a part of the Gospel".⁸⁷ In this way, communicating to TCKs that their longing for home and belonging is met in Christ and his kingdom may be considered sharing the gospel. The good news of comfort for these felt needs is a worthwhile message in its own right.

The concept of citizenship in heaven can also be used as a 'bridge' to connect the reality of passports and culture assimilation familiar to TCKs to biblical truth. TCKs are usually the bridge-builders in their worlds; they "act as ambassadors, bridging the gap and facilitating communication".⁸⁸ When someone else does the work to "bridge the gap" – moving toward the TCK with understanding – this is extremely powerful.⁸⁹ Stott writes about "preaching as bridge-building," helping the listener over "an unbridged chasm between the biblical and the modern worlds".⁹⁰ The concept of citizenship is extremely relevant to TCK, and serves as a perfect bridge to the gospel truth of soteriology, especially justification and sanctification.

⁸⁴ Stott is speaking of preaching specifically, but I see here a worthy goal for all ministry, including preaching. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 325.

⁸⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2014), 124. Referencing Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

⁸⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 122. Referencing Arthur R. Cohen, "Need for Cognition and Order of Communication as Determinants of Opinion Change," in *The Order of Presentation in Persuasion*, ed. Carl I. Hovland (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

⁸⁷ Pat Hile, "Communicating the gospel in terms of felt needs," *Missiology* 5 (1977): 501.

⁸⁸ Jeffrey F. Keuss and Rob Willett, "The sacredly mobile adolescent: a hermeneutic phenomenological study toward revising of the third culture kid typology for effective ministry practice in a multivalent culture," *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 8 (2009): 12.

⁸⁹ Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 26.

⁹⁰ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 139.

Summary

Earthly citizenship is granted by a ruling authority; in the same way, citizens of heaven are granted their identity by the supreme ruling authority – God himself. Earthly citizenship comes with rights and responsibilities; in the same way, citizens of heaven are granted certain rights but also expectations of what it means to identify with this kingdom. A citizen may be recognised by their behaviour, but citizenship is not adopted – it is conferred. One does not become a Christian by acting like one, but through being declared righteous in Christ.

TCKs recognise that a passport is the one clear sign of citizenship. This is what gives you open access and legal rights. Yet they also feel that there is more to being a citizen than possessing a passport. The passport gives them legal rights; residence, cultural understanding, and contribution identify them as part of the community. This conception of citizenship illustrates doctrines of soteriology: the passport is a declaration akin to justification, while personal involvement resonates with the ongoing process of sanctification.

Clearly teaching citizenship in heaven to TCKs, with an understanding of how they connect to the issues of home, belonging and allegiance generally, will offer comfort and provide an effective means of communicating the gospel. This is illustrated beautifully by a comment from a survey participant:

“I had heard of this concept growing up, but it was only once I understood it that my life turned around. I was filled with a sense of belonging that I had maybe never felt before. This revelation brought stability, peace, and hope to my life and was crucial to me continuing and re-establishing my walk with God.”⁹¹

Effective Christian ministry to TCKs will involve understanding their emotional landscape, and recognising the ways in which the gospel speaks specifically to their upbringing and experiences. The theology of “citizenship in heaven” provides one such clear overlap. For many teenagers, citizenship is just a word; for TCKs, it is a well-considered issue, often with deep emotional resonance.

⁹¹ Appendix C contains more information about comments from survey participants.

Conclusion

New Testament writers used images of citizenship in heaven to bring comfort and relief (and encouragement to persevere) to groups of believers struggling to live the Christian life through transition, persecution, and cultural clashes. They wrote “for the sake of readers who were *πάροικοι*, not because they were literally non-citizens, but because they were alienated from their communities as a result of their confession.”⁹² It should come as no surprise that these words therefore bring comfort and relief to TCKs and their experiences of life lived “in between” countries and cultures.⁹³

Understanding the kingdom of heaven as the place they will one day call home forever – an experience of belonging centred both in people and place – speaks to deeply felt emotional needs of TCKs.

“I have this dream of a country that’s completely multicultural, like maybe the UN lives there. . . I do think that it should be stressed how much relief it brings me, knowing that I’m going to get that little island when I die... That’s a huge relief, because it’s something that you’re always aching for, and never think you’re going to get, and then realising that you will – it’s nice. I’m going to be around so many different cultures, and it’ll be home... I’ll actually get it when I go to heaven. And when you’re 13 and you’re 14 and you don’t belong anywhere, and you feel that there’s no place that’s home, it would have been nice to know, to have this as a curriculum, and to know that it’s completely fine if you don’t have a home. You can feel really stressed, because there’s not a place that’s home, I don’t belong anywhere. But you know, there is somewhere, and that’s great! Really helpful.” – Alexis

This emotional connection to lived experience makes citizenship in heaven a powerful tool to teach gospel truth to TCKs. “Listeners understand more deeply and more broadly when preachers connect biblical truths to identifiable experiences.”⁹⁴ An Australian child living in Sydney might *know* the definition of “citizen,” but a TCK *feels* what it means to be a citizen – and what it means to be a foreigner. TCKs resonate with this theology on a deeper level, giving them a perspective other Christians can benefit from. One survey participant explained interaction between a TCK upbringing and citizenship in heaven this way:

“I’m a citizen of heaven. That is the most important part of my identity and my highest allegiance. It means that my goal in life is to advance the kingdom of heaven above all else, and that I identify with other Christians more strongly than I identify with other Australians. I hope that this would be the case even if I wasn’t a TCK, though my cross-cultural upbringing definitely makes this phrase in the Bible and the

⁹² Thompson, “Strangers on the earth,” 205, 206.

⁹³ Crossman, *Misunderstood*, 4.

⁹⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 185.

concept it represents stand out to me in a way that they probably wouldn't otherwise. The fact that I don't really feel at home anywhere on earth and that I love people from very different backgrounds to me means that the concept of citizenship in heaven is a comfort to me in a way that I don't imagine it would be otherwise, and makes it an easier concept for TCKs like me to accept, but it doesn't only apply to us. It applies to all Christians."

Those of us who know and pastorally care for TCKs need to be aware not only of the impact of their international lives, but how their experiences overlap with the message of the gospel. Citizenship in heaven provides a key overlap between TCKs' felt needs and gospel truth. Understanding this, we can sensitively and effectively share Christ's message of hope to these young people in a way that speaks to both their felt needs and their true needs.

Appendix A: Introduction to Interviewees

I worked hard to assemble a group of Christian young adult TCKs to interview for this project which, while small, was quite diverse. The nine young people I interviewed have passports from eight countries on six continents. Five speak English as a first language, but only two grew up speaking only (or at least predominantly) English. Their families moved abroad with different parental occupations: military, international business, missionaries, diplomats, educators, and an IGO. They were schooled in local schools, international schools, Christian schools, boarding schools and were homeschooled.

Alexis, 25

Alexis has a US passport and a wide range of international experiences. She lived in a military family and in an independent teaching family, totalling 7 years of childhood in South Korea and China. She studied in local school, international school, boarding school, and homeschool. She now lives in the US with her husband and their young child.

Bellande, 21

Bellande is a diplomat kid with a Congolese passport who has visited DR Congo only once since leaving at age 4. He grew up attending international schools in China and currently attends university in the USA.

Gabriel, 19

Gabriel is a Brazilian passport holder who lived in Cambodia through his teenage years. He is a missionary kid and attended a Christian international school.

Hayley, 25

Hayley is an Australian passport holder who attended both local and international schools in China while her parents taught in a local university and an international primary school. She also spent time in Nepal and indigenous communities within Australia.

Kaito, 21

Kaito is a Japanese passport holder who moved around due to parents' work with a multinational company. He lived in China, Japan and the Netherlands while growing up, and following university studies in Canada is pursuing permanent residency there.

Lee, 25

Lee is a missionary kid who attended international school, Christian international school, and boarding school. He is a Singaporean passport holder who spent only one year of childhood in Singapore, then served two years' compulsory national service in the Singaporean military. Lee acquired permanent residency in Japan, the country he primarily lived in as a child, also lived in Canada, and has now settled in the UK as an adult.

Min, 26

Min is a Singaporean TCK from a business family which took her to international schools in China and Hongkong. As an adult she added Australia and New Zealand and is now living in Singapore for the first time.

Nadia, 19

Nadia is a Cameroonian TCK who grew up primarily in Tanzania and Cambodia while travelling with a UN-employed parent. She attended Christian international schools abroad. Following high school she studied abroad in France and will attend university in Canada.

Yannick, 25

Yannick is a bicultural and biracial missionary kid with a Swiss passport, who lived in Switzerland for only his first year of life. He grew up primarily in Germany (attending a local school) and China (attending an international school). As an adult he has settled in Germany.

Appendix B: Survey Questions and Statistics

The survey asked eight questions about belonging and citizenship generally, and six questions about citizenship in heaven specifically. The questions, along with the statistics from 92 participants in my target demographic (Christian TCKs aged 16-35), are included below:

Which answer most represents what "home" is to you?

- Home is my passport country [6.5%]
- Home is the place where I grew up (not my passport country). [10%]
- Home is wherever I am currently living. [26%]
- Home is where my immediate family are. (Parents, siblings, spouse, children.) [34%]
- Home is a group of friends I belong to. [6.5%]
- Home is the Christian community I belong to. [5%]
- None of the above [12%]

Which other concepts of "home" do you also identify with?

- Home is my passport country. [33%]
- Home is the place where I grew up (not my passport country). [45%]
- Home is wherever I am currently living. [59%]
- Home is where my immediate family are. (Parents, siblings, spouse, children.) [57%]
- Home is a group of friends I belong to. [41%]
- Home is the Christian community I belong to. [40%]
- None of the above [7%]
- Other (please specify) [16 left written comments explaining their concept of home]

Where do you most feel you belong?

- In my passport country. [2%]
- In another country. [1%]
- In an international/multicultural environment. [31%]
- With my family. [49%]
- With my friends. [10%]
- At my church. [4%]
- None of the above. [3%]

Where else do you feel you belong?

- In my passport country. [34%]
- In another country. [32%]
- In an international/multicultural environment. [61%]
- With my family. [48%]
- With my friends. [56%]
- At my church. [40%]
- None of the above. [5%]
- Other (please specify) [4 left written comments explaining their concept of belonging]

What is patriotism?

- Allegiance to one country above all others. [16%]

- Pride in and love for one country above all others. [33%]
- Love and appreciation for one country. [20%]
- Love and appreciation for any country (can be felt for more than one country). [31%]
- None of the above. [0%]

Are you patriotic?

- Yes, definitely - to one country. [9%]
- Yes, definitely - to more than one country. [16%]
- Yes, to one country, but I do not feel very strongly about it. [9%]
- Yes, to more than one country, but I do not feel very strongly about them. [25%]
- No, I do not feel strongly about any country. [14%]
- No, I believe patriotism is a negative/unhelpful sentiment. [10%]
- My feelings about this are flexible/change. [17%]

What is the primary definition of a citizen?

- A person who holds a passport for a certain country. [65%]
- A person who lives in a certain place. [14%]
- A person who actively contributes to a place. [13%]
- A person who is deeply connected to the language and culture of a place. [7%]
- None of the above. [1%]

Which of these must be true for a person to be considered a "real" citizen?

- Hold a passport. [65%]
- Be a resident. [47%]
- Actively contribute to the country. [41%]
- Speak the language. [30%]
- Understand the culture. [45%]
- None of the above. [6%]
- Other (please specify) [9 left written comments discussing citizenship]

Have you heard the phrase "citizens of heaven" before?

- No. [5%]
- Maybe - I have a vague recollection. [4%]
- Yes - at church. [40%]
- Yes - I read it in the Bible. [37%]
- Yes - but I'm not sure where. [13%]
- No answer [1%]

The New Testament teaches that Christians are "foreigners" on earth because they are "citizens of heaven" (Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 11:13-16, Ephesians 2:12-13, 1 Peter 2:9-12). This means that for Christians, home, belonging and allegiance are all supposed to be centred in God's kingdom rather than earthly places and nations. This heavenly home is described as encompassing all peoples (from all places and languages) without the divisions that separate people on earth (Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-10; Galatians 3:26-29).

- This is very familiar to me. [78%]
- This is somewhat familiar to me. [21%]
- This is completely new to me. [1%]

Have you ever felt like a "foreigner" to earth? (That you don't belong here.)

- I often feel that way [42%]
- I sometimes feel that way [35%]
- I occasionally feel that way [15%]
- I never feel that way [3%]
- I'm not sure. [4%]

How do you feel about this concept of a heavenly kingdom that supersedes human divisions?

- Ambivalent - I don't believe such a place is real. [0%]
- Unsure - it's hard to imagine. [10%]
- Inspiring - I want to see communities that cross divides. [56%]
- Comforting - that's the sort of place I want to belong to. [80%]
- Relief - I didn't know such a place was possible. [10%]
- Not having to choose between the countries I love would be great. [29%]
- I don't believe in exclusive allegiance on earth, but allegiance to a greater reality is something I can accept. [20%]
- Other (please specify) [6 left written comments elaborating on their feelings]

Do you identify as a citizen of heaven?

- Yes, definitely. [70%]
- Yes, somewhat. [19%]
- I'm not sure, but I would like to [11%]
- No, but I would like to. [0%]
- No, and I do not want to. [0%]
- I don't care. [0%]

Appendix C: Additional Material from Surveys

I was amazed at the outpouring of eloquent responses to the final (optional) long form question of the survey: “Do you have any further comments about the concept of “citizenship in heaven”?” There were so many helpful thoughts that I obtained permission from several participants to include their comments anonymously in this appendix.⁹⁵ I also included two in the body of my project (with permission).

These comments illustrate the pastoral importance of “citizenship in heaven” for TCKs. They respond to its themes and message, and find in this theology comfort to help them move forward in their transient earthly lives, as well as understanding of their true place in God’s kingdom, and context for how to live on earth as “sojourners and strangers”.

“I found this idea so comforting as I was moving between countries and cultures. It is the most important constant to me as I still grapple with my own identity and belonging, I never have to question my belonging in heaven.”

“It is a concept that I think about more than most of my friends. It was especially comforting when I first moved back to the states. There was a realization that I never felt content in either country I had lived in. Remembering that ultimately my citizenship is not placed on earth rationalized the feeling of discontentment.”

“I like it because it means I don’t HAVE to belong here. It is a comforting idea but not because it’s a culmination of different cultures in which I want to live. It’s comforting because there I will find my place despite the difficulty of doing that here – the hardship and loneliness will end.”

“My heavenly citizenship definitely affects the way I approach my Australian citizenship. I see my Australian citizenship as a tool to be used for the kingdom of heaven, both in Australia and overseas. Luckily I was born an Australian citizen, because I couldn’t vow to become a citizen in good conscience. It probably wouldn’t hurt to be a little more loyal to Australia than I am, but I know for certain that my loyalty to heaven should be stronger. My citizenship in heaven is both my primary loyalty and a great comfort, as a citizen is one who has the right to enter. As with my Australian citizenship, I didn’t earn it but was given it because of no merit of my own.”

“I find it very comforting and foundational to my identity knowing that my citizenship goes beyond the material world we currently know. I do think, however, this concept – when viewed in an unhealthy manner – can lead to escapism in the church. That, I believe, is unbiblical and unproductive. We are called to engage the world we live in and not retreat from it due to discomfort or lack of national identity.”

“I find this a core value in my own faith. In my experience, churches that actively practice faith based on a shared heavenly citizenship have much stronger communities than those that do not. It’s an especially comforting idea to someone with a multi-cultural background that has felt out of place in one way or another their entire life.”

⁹⁵ Several responses to my request to include anonymous comments were along the lines of “it doesn’t need to be anonymous – tell everyone about this!”

“The comfort that statement provides, when I feel out of place, when I feel as though everything I’ve known is changed and gone, gives me the confidence to be the person my heavenly Father has made me to be.”

“Quite often I have thought that I was not connecting back in society, back to my home country. I thought I was not putting myself out there enough or I was just too different for people. I then realised that had nothing to do with earthly things as much. People are generally accepting of people in my circles however it was the idea of citizen of heaven was why I did not feel so at home. I then realised that until I completely felt at home in Jesus I was not going to feel a sense of belonging. That is where I feel it is most healthy to have patriotic attitudes towards heaven/ new Jerusalem as that’s where we will feel at home!”

“With the rising sentiments of division and closed borders (when globalisation actually helps economies and social standards as a whole), I need the reminder once in a while that there is more to this earth than imagined borders and political divides – there’s a greater promise where there’s no hurt, no tears and no pain, where everyone belongs and is made perfect and is truly joyful for each other’s presence.”

“My idea of citizenship in heaven is radically different from my ideas of earthly, legal citizenship. Earthly citizenship is fractured, flawed, imperfect; citizenship in heaven is the complete, holistic, perfect version.”

“That idea is the sole hope I have in life on earth. Knowing that the discomfort and feelings of exclusion in this world end and there’s a place of eternal belonging and dwelling with God waiting for me is the greatest thing I can look forward to.”

“I’m so happy that one day I’ll be truly home.”

Yes, and Amen.

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