

"CITIZENSHIP"
(Acts 21:40-22:29)
(Mark Reasoner)

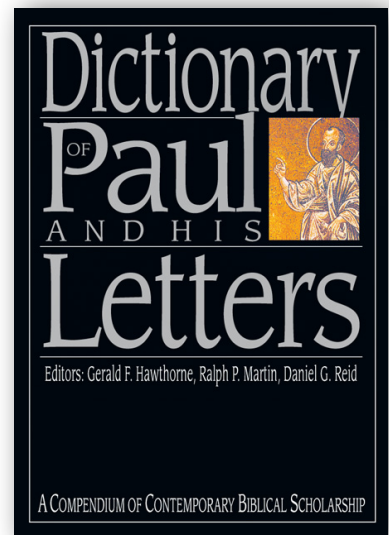
Roman citizenship was a matter of considerable advantage for travel in the Mediterranean world of the first century. Paul's Roman citizenship greatly enhanced his ministry. His acquaintance with the issues of citizenship allowed him to use it as a fitting metaphor for participation in the kingdom of God.

Roman Citizenship.

The biblical case for Paul's legal standing as a Roman citizen rests primarily on three texts in Acts. Paul's mention of the Roman citizenship he and Silas enjoyed provides the context for their release from jail in Philippi (Acts 16:37-39). Then at the end of his speech before the people in Jerusalem, Paul's citizenship is once again helpful in allowing for his protection by the Roman garrison from the angry crowd (Acts 22:25-29). At his hearing in Caesarea before Festus over two years later, after Festus offered to conduct a full trial back in Jerusalem, Paul used his right as a Roman citizen to reject the offer and to appeal for trial before Caesar (Acts 25:7-12). Agrippa II mentions this appeal to Festus after Paul testifies before them (Acts 26:32).

Paul's Roman Citizenship. Arguments advanced against Paul's Roman citizenship, most recently by Stegemann, have been soundly answered by Hengel. Roman historians also accept Paul's citizenship as most probable. According to traditions preserved in Jerome (Philemon commentary; *Vir.* 5) and Phodus (*Quaest. Amphil.* 116), Paul's parents were carried off as prisoners of war from the Judean town of Gischala to Tarsus. Presumably enslaved to a Roman, they were freed and granted citizenship. The rights of a Roman citizenship included *provocatio* (the right to appeal after trial), *muneris publici vacatio* (exemption from imperial duties such as military service), and the right of an accused citizen to choose either a local or a Roman trial. A right that was usually (but not always) honored in the provinces was that Roman citizens were exempt from flogging. The best explanation for Paul's silence about his Roman citizenship in Philippi until after his scourging (Acts 16:22-23) is that he wanted to follow Jesus in suffering (Phil 3:10-11; Col 1:24; 2 Cor 4:7-10; 6:4-10). It is likely that there were other occasions also in which Paul kept silent and so surrendered this Roman right (2 Cor 11:25). When Paul did claim Roman citizenship (Acts 16:3,7; 22:25-28), it is most likely that he produced as evidence a birth certificate or certificate of citizenship, which Roman citizens carried with them.

Paul's Appeal to Caesar. Against Lyall and Sherwin-White, the evidence favors Garnsey's reconstruction of Paul's appeal not as a *provocatio* appeal, but as a rejection of one court in favor of another (*reiectio*). This was a right Paul had as a Roman citizen, subject to Festus's approval. Garnsey notes that Acts 25 is the only example ever cited for evidence of *provocatio* before trial. Elsewhere such an appeal always occurs after trial. A close reading of Acts 25:9-12 shows that what is at issue is the location for Paul's trial. Paul did not want to be tried in Jerusalem as Festus suggested; for it was there that he was first imprisoned because of Jewish antipathy (Acts 22:22-29) and because it was clear that Festus wanted to please the Jews (Acts 25:9). It is also clear that Paul's rejection of trial in Jerusalem for trial in Rome was not



automatically accepted. Festus only agreed after conferring with his advisors (Acts 25:12), for he had the authority to override Paul's plea. What occurred in Caesarea was not a complete trial, therefore, but a preliminary hearing. Paul's appeal to Caesar was not simply because he wanted to go to Rome, but also because he did not want to stand trial in Jerusalem.

Implications of Paul's Roman Citizenship. As a Roman, Paul writes of his mission plans with a map of the Roman Empire in mind (Rom 15:19,24) and gives no indication that he plans to evangelize in places outside the Empire's boundaries. His Roman citizenship shows in his recognition that citizens were accountable for two kinds of taxes, *tributum* (direct taxes) and *vectigalia* (sales taxes on slave transactions and customs fees), as Romans 13:7 shows, making use of comparable Greek terms for these taxes. The fact that his section on obedience to the government ends with tax payment shows his own recognition that taxes were a duty (*munus*) one carried as a citizen, and an unpopular one at that time, (cf. TacitusAnn. 13.50-51). Other language in Romans that perhaps indicates Paul's Roman citizenship includes his allusion to Roman military policy when he describes his apostolic commission in Romans 1:5 and his acknowledgement of the Roman preoccupation with legal matters (Rom 7:1). But in most of Paul's letters he does not give evidence of his Roman citizenship, for to him another citizenship was more important.

Heavenly Citizenship.

While explicit language related to heavenly citizenship is rare in Paul, the metaphor of heavenly citizenship is clearly an influential force in his theology. In both ethical injunctions and eschatological descriptions, it is clear that Paul uses this citizenship to describe the believer's participation in the kingdom of God.

Ethical Injunctions. Paul's idea of heavenly citizenship is communicated with full cognizance of his church members' participation in their local societies as Citizens (1 Cor. 5:9-10; Rom 13:1-7). In this sense it is possible that Paul has in mind the legal status of dual citizenship (see Phil 1:27). The fact that Christians are citizens of both earth and heaven leads to Paul's ambassadorial language in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and Ephesians 6:19-20. As citizens of heaven, Christians have the responsibility to think consistently with their citizenship (Col 3:1-4) and live holy lives (Rom 13:12-14). Paul's own idea of his heavenly citizenship allowed him to live in a way that freed him to be all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Paul's doctrine of heavenly citizenship and its implications for living are close to 1 Peter 2:11, although Paul does not use the metaphor of sojourning as strongly as Peter. Philippians 3:20 (in the light of Phil 1:27) provides the best example of heavenly citizenship terminology in Paul. This citizenship here provides the ground for Paul's commands to avoid thinking in an earthly way (Phil 2:34; 3:19), and instead to follow his example (Phil 3:17) as befits one who rejoices in God's goodness, praying and thinking in a God-centered way (Phil 4:1-9). The description of Christians' heavenly citizenship in Philippians 3:20 also is linked to the expectation of the *parousia* and the physical transformation to occur at that time (Phil 3:20-21).

Eschatological Descriptions. The sense that Christians are headed for a citizenship in the next life is a powerful force in Paul's theology. Thus we see in 1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:24 how an understanding of the rights and destiny of the heavenly citizen leads to a certain pattern of behavior. In Romans 8:12-30, the prospect of participation as a citizen in the new creation; is inextricably linked both to one's status as a child of God and the concomitant behavior that such future citizenship and adoption necessarily implies for the present. Paul's eschatological understanding of heavenly citizenship includes the conviction that the Christian is not ultimately subject to death, and ought therefore to live for values that will outlast life on earth (1 Cor 15:53-58).