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Is citizenship permanent like a stone foundation or can it be washed away like sand on the beach? For Americans born on U.S. soil, the answer seems straight forward. Headlines from around the world, including some American ones, suggest that the best answer may be, “It depends.”

The investment migration site IMI Daily on August 26th carried the article, “Cypress Revokes 10 More Citizenships amid Ongoing Probe.” Cyprus used to offer citizenship to individuals who invested 2.5 million euros. The article notes, “The program proved particularly attractive to Russian and Chinese nationals seeking EU passports.” When this pathway to citizenship was scrutinized by the authorities (after it was discontinued), officials found over half of the 6779 new Cypriots who took this route were ineligible to be citizens.

The digital news organization Middle East Eye on August 26 featured, “How the UAE Crushes Dissent by Arbitrarily Revoking Citizenship.” The article asserts that the citizenship revocation campaign began in 2011, “. . . when 133 Emirati academics, judges, lawyers, students and human rights defenders signed a petition addressed to the president of the UAE . . . calling for democratic reforms.” Before the year was out seven of these signatories were rendered stateless by having their Emirati citizenship revoked. In the years since 2011, petitioners and their families have continued to be targeted for citizenship revocation or have not been able to renew passports and other official documents (which has the same effect).

The August 26th edition of the American Conservative proclaimed “Ending Birthright Citizenship Is Harder Than It Sounds.” The article cites politicians who have pledged to end birthright citizenship for children born in the U.S. whose parents do not have legal status. The author provides a selection from the 14th Amendment (adopted in 1868) which says, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States.” Another talisman cited for birthright citizenship is the Wong decision. In 1898 an ethnically Chinese man born in the U.S. to immigrant parents was denied citizenship. He took his case all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor, and for over 100 years, the Wong decision has been used to rebuff all attempts to restrict birthright citizenship.

The New Testament example of birthright citizenship was provided by the apostle Paul. He was arrested for disturbing the peace in Jerusalem (Acts 21:33). The troop commander ordered Paul to be flogged and interrogated (Acts 22:24). As Paul was being tied to the whipping post, he questioned the legality of his punishment because Paul was a Roman citizen (act 22:25). The commander came to verify Paul’s citizenship (Act 22:27). Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.’ Paul replied, ‘I was born a citizen’” (Act 22:28). Paul’s birthright citizenship allowed him to take his case to Caesar in Rome, the supreme court of his day (Acts 25:12).

Roman citizenship appeared to be set in stone. That is until the empire itself crumbled. The only citizenship that is truly immutable is built on a different kind of stone. This Stone, Jesus Christ, is the stone the builders rejected (Mark 12:10 and Eph 2:20). Through faith in Jesus believers are told, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household” (Eph 2:19). This citizenship can never be revoked.