

The Spirit of Freedom

Today is July 4th. We all know it to be the birthday of our country 245 years ago. It's the day in 1776 that representatives from the 13 colonies signed the Declaration of Independence. But do Americans today fully understand what this date represents in human history? To forget our history is to put our future at risk. Amnesia is worse than nostalgia.

Perhaps the most memorable words of the Declaration are these: **"We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."** Repetition of that phrase has softened its earth-shattering truth. It says the value of each person is not derived from government benevolence or even from the mercies of democracy. We are not the result of natural causes, but of a supernatural cause. Created in the image of God, each individual has dignity and freedom. We hold human lives sacred because God has made them so. We cherish freedom because God has given it. Government's purpose, in this view, is to protect our unalienable rights from infringement by criminals and governments. These are the beliefs that underly the foundation of this nation – the sentiments of 1776. We are not a nation of one race or ethnicity, but a nation of ideals rooted in biblical principles. Am I saying that the U.S. is a "Christian nation?" No, the Christian faith is not imposed by government. However, I am saying that Christian and Jewish influence are essential to the continued thriving of a free and self-governing people - a republic by ideas, intention, and design.

The Great Divide

[There was a time when most Americans had some basic understanding of the Declaration of Independence and this nation's founding. Appreciation for history is scarce today, and what is taught on college campuses or in the schools is, I fear, a one-sided or perverted version of America's history. Public debate is only rarely informed by foundational principles and is often choked off by calling people "racist."]

This past year the voices decrying all the flaws of the U.S., past and present, grew to a crescendo. Open attacks on the founding principles of this nation now arise in the streets and in the halls of Congress. What are we to make of this? Some say that America is more deeply divided today than at any time since the Civil War. Author Os Guinness says: The division is not simply the result of growing inequities, the clash between the coastals (New York and California) and the heart-landers (in the Midwest and South), or between the populists (Hillary Clinton's "deplorables") and the globalists (one-world advocates of borderless nations). The deepest division is between two mutually exclusive views of America: those who understand America and freedom from the perspective of 1776 and the American Revolution, and those who understand America and freedom from the perspective of 1789 and the French Revolution and its ideological heirs.¹

The American Revolution has its roots solidly in Jewish and Christian beliefs about God's action in human history. The Exodus (God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt), followed by the giving of the 10 Commandments is the foundation and model of a nation living in ordered freedom. The vision of the American Revolution is of a morally responsible society of independent, free people who are covenanted to each other and to justice, peace, and stability, for the good of their community. [This vision flowed from the ideas and writings of intellectuals and theologians in the 17th century rediscovering the truths of the Bible. The Great Awakening of 1730 (revival of Christian faith) strengthened these beliefs among people.] It is no small thing that our Declaration of Independence begins with an appeal to God, and in closing sentences again appeals to God, referring to him as "Supreme Judge" and "Divine Providence." The signers of that Declaration (and the generations followed) recognized that only a people who humbly bowed before God would be moral enough to live

in their God-given freedom and exercise their unalienable rights. The American Revolution produced a constitution that established a limited government to protect individual liberty within an ordered society. The American Revolution has given hope and inspiration to people around the globe who aspire to the freedom that facilitates being fully human. The record of the American Revolution has been one of correcting the nation's flaws and paving the way for more freedom and prosperity than ever before in history.

Contrast that with the French Revolution whose roots are in the French Enlightenment of the 18th century. The Revolutionaries of Paris and their philosophical heirs believed that the Enlightenment had superseded any rational belief in God once and for all. As the philosopher Diderot put it: the French would never be truly free until "they strangled the last king with the guts of the last priest." The French Revolution was about tearing down the establishment - including religion and God. They replaced it with a reign of terror, the guillotine, and war. Their motto of "Brotherhood, Equality, and Liberty" took a back seat to those who sought power. Current thought movements such as postmodernism, political correctness, tribal and identity politics, the sexual revolution, critical theory (or grievance studies), and socialism all come down from 1789 and have nothing to do with the ideas of 1776.² The offspring of 1789 are: Marxism, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949, today's progressive leftist politics, CRT, Antifa, BLM, and the sexual liberation movement.

The record of the French Revolution, wherever its ideas have been imposed, has been the loss of freedom and justice, the growth poverty, fear, repression, and millions of lives sacrificed. The demand for equality, now morphed into cries for equity, simply means the equal sharing of misery for most, as the ruling class enjoys fabulous wealth and power. It will always be so because their underlying beliefs reject God. Free to write their own charter of morality, the heirs of the French Revolution reveal the depravity that is in human nature cut off from our Creator.

[You hear much in the media and from the White House these days about the threat of "White supremacists." Indeed, there are such groups and individuals. But please understand: today's right-wing *and* left-wing violent radicals are from the same mold. Both are heirs of 1789 who consider our nation's founding illegitimate and our Christian faith an enemy. The proper response is to condemn both groups of radicals as they are a direct threat to constitutional government. The real contest is between the vast, law-abiding majority of democratic citizens, and these small groups of twisted violent losers parading in the streets with weapons, wearing masks, throwing cement-filled soda cans.³]

Unfortunately, today's young people and too many politicians reject the ideas of 1776 without understanding them, and embrace ideas from 1789 without examining them or where they always lead. Let's be clear: the sons and daughters of the American Revolution believe in liberty, "in God we trust," and in E pluribus unum (from many, one). The sons and daughters of the French Revolution (and all the radical "isms") reject those ideas and the values derived from them. All people are created equal, but not all ideas are equal. Some have less intrinsic value. Some are bad. Some are inherently dangerous. What we are seeing and hearing these days from the progressive left in our society are bad and dangerous ideas. So, the division in America is not over race or income. The division is between those who believe in the ideals of 1776 versus those who push the agenda of 1789.

Biblical Roots

Those who signed the Declaration of Independence were quite familiar with the biblical concepts concerning governance and freedom. The story of Moses, in the Old Testament, leading the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, is also understood as a metaphor of liberation from slavery to sin. The Bible is the story of God's gift of life and freedom to humans. God's greatest gift to us - Christ Jesus - frees us from the shackles of sin, *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that ...we should no longer be slaves to sin...* Romans 6:6.

"The Declaration of Independence is a great spiritual document (President Calvin Coolidge, July 5, 1926). It is a declaration not of material but of spiritual conceptions. Equality, liberty, popular sovereignty, the rights of man - these are not elements which we can see and touch... They have their

source and their roots in the religious convictions... Unless the faith of the American in these religious convictions is to endure, the principles of our Declaration will perish. We cannot continue to enjoy the result if we neglect and abandon the cause... We live in an age of science and of abounding accumulation of material things. These did not create our Declaration. Our Declaration created them. The things of the spirit come first. Unless we cling to that, all our material prosperity, overwhelming though it may appear, will turn to barren scepter in our grasp.”⁴

Freedom For The Flawed

Name all the flaws found in America’s history that the purveyors of “critical theory” shout about, and you have identified the sin that resides in every human heart. But to decry these sins as evidence of the inherent evil of America is to profoundly misunderstand reality. Don’t be fooled by the utopian visions of these Marxists. Humans are sinful – and that includes the ruling elite of any form of government. That is the reason for limited government. However, if enough people are redeemed from sin by God’s grace, they can govern themselves, through dispersed authority and decision making. *For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery,* Gal. 5:1.

What is exceptional about America is that founding itself on God’s guidance revealed in Scripture, the American vision⁵ has believed that a virtuous people could govern themselves and enjoy freedom with order. The great hymn “America the Beautiful” expresses the underlying truth of American governance, “America! America! God mend thine every flaw! Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.” The great American contribution to the world is securing freedom for sinful people by reconciling liberty with law. Liberty without constraints of law brings license leading to immorality and anarchy. The Bible reminds us, *...do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love,* Galatians 5:13.

When you destroy the moral law (as has been happening in this nation) you undermine the reason for honoring any law. The American Constitution is not founded on political atheism, but recognizes that human rights and morality come from God. Christianity instructs us: *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God,* 1 Peter 2:16.

“Where laws end, tyranny begins.” If we lose the Christian and Jewish morality that has guided our country we will surely lose our freedom, our prosperity, and the ability to help other nations.

For Our Children and Beyond

If we want the blessings of liberty for our children, and our children’s children, and beyond, we better get serious about our faith in Christ. God provides the blueprint of what human life was and is intended to be. God through Moses liberated the Israelites and led them into a life of freedom in law. Jesus of Nazareth, framed his life in accordance with divine morality, and His faith and obedience never stifled his freedom. *I do always those things which please him,*” John 8:29 (meaning His heavenly Father). He was utterly free of covetousness, free of hypocrisy, free of the fear of others, free to be Himself. He was free to look into people’s hearts and tell them the truth about themselves, free to love men and women with purity, and free to voluntarily surrender his life for others. *The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord...*” John 10:17-18.

Our mission is to teach our children to live moral lives that honor God, follow God’s law, and resist tyranny – and to do likewise ourselves. Wherever God is marginalized or banished from the life of a people, the lamp of liberty is dimmed. As churches decline in America so does freedom and prosperity. You need to be in church. This is no time for “fair weather Christians.”

So, on this day, the celebration of Independence for this nation, let us give thanks to God for all His blessings and remember:

- Our true freedom comes from God.
- Freedom is rooted in spiritual truth.
- Freedom for all begins with each one of us.

- Our dignity and freedom are preserved in the faith of a people who trust in God.
- Our nation's freedom depends on all of us.
These truths we must hand on to our children and grandchildren.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, 2 Corinthians 3:17.

¹ Os Guinness, *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, 6.

², *Ibid*, 6.

³ James S. Robbins, columnist, USA Today.

⁴ President Calvin Coolidge, July 5, 1926

⁵ Proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and enshrined and protected in the Constitution.