

June 1st, 2010

...Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. (Psalm 105:4)

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Freedom. (after Matthew 11:28-30)

There's nothing so binding as freedom,
With no rules, or lines of restraint;
But in the yoke and the bonds of Lord Jesus,
There's nothing so free as a saint. • ejr3

THIS ONLY WOULD I LEARN FROM YOU: DID YOU RECEIVE THE SPIRIT BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW, OR BY THE HEARING OF FAITH? ARE YOU SO FOOLISH? HAVING BEGUN IN THE SPIRIT, ARE YOU NOW BEING MADE PERFECT BY THE FLESH?

GALATIANS 3:2-3

Quote of the Week. from George Washington

“Almighty God; We make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection; and Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the field.

“And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Devine Author of our religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation.

“Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Prayer cited from *America's God & Country*, Wm. J. Federer, (St. Louis: Amerisearch, Inc., 2000) p647.

Feature Article:

A Consistent New Covenant Perspective on Government.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ...For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Romans 13:1, 4

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh... Rom 8:3

As Americans who have just celebrated *Memorial Day* in honor of those who have died serving our Nation in defense of liberty, I believe most would be hard pressed to give a concise statement of exactly what is meant by ‘liberty’. Most, perhaps, would, say something like, “It’s being free to do whatever you want.” Christians, of all people, should have solid (and unified) understanding and clarity of liberty, and the role of government regarding it. I fear, however, that such is not the case.

In an effort to combat the excesses of a society that, in the name of liberty, has “fallen away from God”, many Christians engage in fighting the “culture wars” by seeking to use the arm of political pressure to restore righteousness to the land. There is a disconnect, it would seem, between a stated “faith” in the Gospel of Grace, and the methodology deemed necessary to confront the “real” problems of the world.

The very gospel which we profess, however, insists that law is absolutely powerless to deliver from the bondage and power of sin. The letter (law) can only kill and condemn; it can never transform the sinner. Yet so many Christians think that the necessary objective is to establish and enforce “righteous” moral laws.

Our “founding fathers”, for the most part, understood the difficulty. While insisting that the new nation could not survive unless the *people*, individuals, maintained a vibrant faith and conducted themselves accordingly, they ultimately resisted the temptation to accomplish that purpose through *law*. Our early presidents repeatedly called upon the American people to remember their Creator, to actively engage in religion, and to pray for God’s mercy. In times of national crisis they called, not just for days of prayer, but for days of *repentance*. This they considered their *duty* as national leaders. But they did not attempt to *pass legislation* to accomplish these ends. Whenever such legislation was proposed, it was soundly defeated.

What, then, we may ask, is the purpose of government? Is not government, according to the Bible, for the punishment of 'evil-doers'? Is this not a moral issue? And is not morality a '*religious*' issue? If so, whose morality, based on what religion, is government to enforce? The 'pat' Christian answer is that we were founded as a Christian nation, upon Biblical truth, and *that* is what we must return to. This is only partially true. Indeed, the centrality of Christ and the Bible in our founding is undeniable *if* we read the actual writings of the founders, and not the revisionist histories that have permeated the last hundred years. But it was their Christian-centric understanding that, in the end, *prevented* them from adopting, for example, the Ten Commandments, or any other moral list, as the "law of the land."

Instead, they framed the responsibility of government around, not the enumeration of moral commands, but upon the defining and protecting of the 'God-given' rights of the individual; and they constitutionally limited the scope of government to that purpose. By carefully constructed checks and balances, they also sought to limit the power of any one branch of government. (Please read this again).

The defining of individual rights and liberties based upon the scriptures precipitated the unparalleled genius of the *American Experiment*. Though law could not legislate morality, it *could* define and protect liberties, and this became the "law of the land", constitutionally. For government, the only 'morality' for which it is responsible, is the maintaining of individual liberties, and *justly* dealing with those "evil-doers" who violate another's constitutional rights - rights briefly comprehended in *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness* (self determined well-being).

These rights were further enumerated based upon the Bible - predominately (and ironically!) the *Ten Commandments*. In this 'old covenant' established by God with the children of Israel, were inherently embedded presumed *God-given liberties*. As I have enumerated them before: the first four commandments presumed the *freedom of (not from) religion, free speech, and the right to peaceably assemble*. Clearly embedded in the other six commandments were the *individual's right to life* (6th), the *sanctity of marriage* and the *autonomy of the family unit* (5th & 7th), the *individual's right to fair and truthful application of justice* (9th), and the *right to private ownership and protection of property* (8th & 10th). These rights, along with the defining and limiting of the *form and scope* of government, are the definition of

American Liberty. If I kill someone, the government's only concern is that I have violated someone's "right to life", and I must be justly punished. If I steal, the only 'morality' that the government must consider is that I have violated another's constitutional "right to private ownership of property." And so it goes...

As *New Covenant Christians*, knowing the futility of using *law* to impart righteousness, we must be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The law (Biblical or otherwise) cannot "fix" America, or restore her people to righteousness. *Speaking the truth in love*, we must be focused *first* on the proclamation of Christ and the Gospel, which is the only liberating power on earth to change a people's heart. Simultaneously, as is our right *by law*, we should seek prayerfully, boldly, and peacefully to restore our nation to its *constitutional foundations*. If we proclaim these *positive liberties*, by which all peoples of all faiths (and non-faiths) will be blessed, we will, perhaps, avoid *some* of the quagmire of "religious argument." At the least, we will not be conflicted Christians, as we avoid the obscuring the Gospel of Grace by an over-emphasis on law.

In the end, *our* hope and security is in Jesus Christ and His kingdom. We must peacefully trust God for whatever results He has ordained for our efforts; and we must never lose sight of command to *stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free* (Galatians 5:1). ●ejr3

Devotional Minute:

Social Snobbery. (*no comment needed*)

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you [just] pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes, ...have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ...Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich* in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man... *James 2:1-6*

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