

Independence Day 2023 – A Free Church in a Free State

The United States was the first government founded on the freedom of personal expression, but it has not been maintained without many attempts to circumvent that freedom. As we celebrate Independence Day, we reinforce in our national conscience the role of Government as the protector of that freedom.

1. Freedom, the Foundation of Independence Day -

In a democratic society, the role of government is multifaceted, with the primary purpose of ensuring the well-being and freedom of its citizens. Striking a delicate balance, the government should neither act as a paternal figure dictating every aspect of individuals' lives nor serve as a mere servant carrying out every demand. Instead, it is essential for the government to function as a protector of freedom, enabling individuals to live responsibly and exercise their rights.

The foundation of a democratic society rests on a people who will exercise the principle of individual freedom with responsibility before God. The government assumes the crucial role of safeguarding these liberties and ensuring their preservation. By enacting and upholding laws that safeguard the rights of citizens, such as freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, the government acts as a guardian of individual autonomy. It establishes a framework within which people can responsibly pursue their goals, express their ideas, and live their lives without undue interference.

Rom 13:1-5 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall

receive to themselves damnation.
3For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

Titus 3:1 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

Dictating every aspect of citizens' lives infringes upon personal freedoms and stifling individual initiative. But so does a government that attempts to be an all-encompassing caretaker. It is important to recognize that while the government has a responsibility to serve the benefit of the citizens, it must not impede their inherent right to make choices and take responsibility for their actions.

2. Baptists and a Free Church in a Free State -

Especially for the last 500 years, Christians who have organized as Baptist churches have been at the forefront for what has been called "a free church in a free state."

"A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power."
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"A free church in a free state does not mean a church, without discipline and without order, but a church with freedom to order its own life in accordance with its own principles and its own conscience." - J. Gresham Machen

"Religious liberty is the chief cornerstone of the American system of government, and provisions for its security are embedded in the written charter and interwoven in the moral fabric of its laws." - Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas

Counter to the free church in a free state, throughout history, man has witnessed various attempts to establish God's kingdom on earth, driven by the desire to bring about a perfect society under guided by their interpretation of God's will. However, it is essential to recognize that the true manifestation of God's kingdom, where Christ reigns over all, is reserved for the Millennial reign of Christ which is the last dispensation of God's work with man.

From religious movements aiming to establish earthly paradises to political ideologies driven by a utopian vision, these endeavors have often led to disappointment and disillusionment. The fallacy lies in the belief that humans possess the capacity to establish and sustain a perfect society without acknowledging the limitations of human nature and the need for divine intervention.

The medieval Crusades, while initially driven by religious zeal, revealed the dangers of imposing religious dominance by force. The various totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, such as communism and fascism, sought to create earthly paradises but instead resulted in oppression, suffering, and the suppression of religious freedom. The history of Christianity from 300-1800 AD is a record of resistance to a state establishment of religion. Today, Islam,

a political movement with a facade of spirituality, is the most active power trying to impose a kingdom of God.

The blessing of the American Revolution and the establishment of individual rights calls upon us to live even more responsibly in our times.

1Pet 2:13-16 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

We are looking forward to the Millennium after the Seven Year Tribulation when Christ will rule the earth for a thousand years before Satan is allowed to make his last ditch attempt to come to power.

Rev 20:1-9 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither

his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection.

6Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

7And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

8And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom *is* as the sand of the sea.

9And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

Embracing the millennial dispensation acknowledges the necessity of divine intervention and recognizes that human efforts alone are insufficient to establish God's kingdom on earth. It is a period when humanity will demonstrate its dependence on God's grace, having realized the limitations of its own power.

3. The purpose of freedom for a Christian -

We have to be careful of how we exercise the influence we have in society today. In Christian circles there is a *Kingdom Now* theology that appropriately wants to have Christian influence on society and governance. But, it runs the risk of going too far. This is also known as *Dominion Theology* or *Reconstructionism*. Proponents of this theology are in danger of becoming so excited that establishing Biblical

morality by law and social control becomes their primary effort. While it is essential to understand the limitations of human efforts to establish God's kingdom on earth, it does not diminish the importance of our influence and responsibility, but not to the point where we merely seek power to impose the church on others. We must appreciate our freedom to *invite* others, but not to *force* others to our views. We are called to be ambassadors of Christ, promoting justice, compassion, and righteousness in the world, but not without losing sight of our primary mission.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

It is a mistake to think that the world is going to be more and more like the kingdom until it is almost like the Millennium. That should not lead us to despair or inaction. Instead, it should inspire hope and a deeper trust in God's providence. Our ultimate hope lies in the realization that God's plan for humanity extends beyond our earthly existence. The promise of the millennial dispensation reminds us that, in due time, God will establish His kingdom in its fullness, bringing justice, peace, and reconciliation to all creation. In the meantime, our focus should be on faithfully living out our calling, trusting in God's perfect timing and ultimate fulfillment of His divine plan.

Eph 1:6-10 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:

It is crucial to reaffirm the primary focus of the Church: to share the gospel. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, offering hope, redemption, and eternal life to all who believe. By faithfully fulfilling this calling, we contribute to the advancement of God's kingdom in hearts and minds, allowing His transformative power to work within. The sharing of the gospel serves as a catalyst for spiritual awakening and discipleship, enabling people to experience the true peace and fulfillment that comes from a relationship with God. While we strive to be agents of positive change in society, let us never forget that the ultimate goal of the Church is to lead people to encounter the life-changing message of God's love and grace.

Perhaps you noticed the word *responsibility* sprinkled throughout the message. None of this message is possible without recognizing our responsibility before God. If we do not exercise our responsibility to answer to God, then government *will* become our father and master. If we will not stand righteously before God, then government *will* step in for the sake of peace and control your life. The key here, then, is to face God and take account of your relationship with Him. Do you have a right standing with God? No one would claim to be perfect before God, but you *can* be forgiven. You first need to be saved and have your sinfulness paid for by the blood of Christ's sacrifice by repenting and calling on Him to save you from your sin. Next, when you are one with Christ because He then made you His child, are you living irresponsibly abusively taking advantage of His grace? If you refuse to enter into serving Him then you are inviting government to take God's place. God rules at this time primarily by us setting the example for

the world and being the ones who carry His word to the world that needs saving.

The government will support your child to meds and irreversible treatments, but it is not going to instruct your children in the faith. The government might bring a welfare check, but it is not going to bring the Gospel to the inner city. The government might redistribute your income to causes that you oppose, but it will not provide Gospel literature or Bible education. The government can give you social security, but it can't give you eternal security.

We know how the future is going to play out, but to the degree God's people respond to God we will have the kingdom effect in our country. But more than that, we will be prepared for when His kingdom does come. It will mean a whole new lifestyle for many, but living the kingdom in your heart and towards those around you will be far better than giving up and letting government become your dictator.

1. Freedom, the Foundation of Independence Day - Rom 13:1-5, Titus 3:1
2. Baptists and a Free Church in a Free State - 1Pet 2:13-16, Rev 20:1-9
3. The purpose of freedom for a Christian - Luke 19:10, Eph 1:6-10