

LVII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Christian Patriotism—Should Christians Be Patriotic?”

Proverbs 14:34

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In this study we will be looking at what the Bible says about Christian patriotism and we will go to several passages of Scripture as we do this. Is there such a thing as Christian patriotism? If so, what does it look like? How should it form and frame our lives as believers? I thank You Lord that You will be our Teacher through Your infallible Word and that You will speak to the hearts of Your people through this Word. Confirm what we know as true and show us what we need to know is true. If what we think is true but is not true then dismiss it from our hearts, Lord, Amen.

Proverbs 14:34 says [34] *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.* First, I want to address why I am addressing this issue of Christian patriotism. One, this like anything else in the Christian life always begs for us to be careful not to step on either side of a divine or a balance beam so to speak. The Christian life is like being on a narrow path and almost on every single doctrine or dynamic of the Christian life there are two ditches that you want to avoid on both sides. You always have to be aware of them. On this matter of Christian patriotism you have to be aware of nationalism that abuses and uses Christianity to further a nation. In other words, my title for this study was not Patriotism and Christianity because my point is to identify what Christian patriotism is. I did this specifically because the adjective controls the noun. The adjective is Christianity which defines patriotism. It is not a patriotism you start with where you make use of Christianity but what Christian patriotism would be for Christians. What does this look like and what should it be?

The other side of it is that Jesus Christ is King and I am a part of the Kingdom of God. My citizenship is in the Kingdom of God and therefore because of my singular devotion to the supremacy of King Jesus I really don't think there is any such thing as Christian patriotism. I am in a nation and I will certainly obey its laws but not only should I not feel a love for a nation, identify with a nation but I think that would be counterproductive. Would not that be raising up a competitor with my devotion and allegiance to Christ? Would that not be counterproductive to my singular, supremacy of Christ my King and my engagement in His Kingdom? We have many evangelical believers that take that position.

Every time we do a service on Christianity's work in this country you might want to see the emails I get from other pastors around the world, our nation and even from our own denomination. They are rather challenging letters to this issue. On the other hand, I can understand their concern because I have seen many who have taken the Gospel and not addressed the American experiment as their forbearers did but they have taken the Gospel and wrapped it up in an American flag instead of having it address what the flag stands for and define what it stands for. So we don't want to be engaged in Nationalism that makes use of and abuses Christianity but does that mean we can't have and shouldn't have a love for the nation that is informed and directed by our Christianity?

I strongly believe that there is something called Christian patriotism. Why would I believe that? The Proverbs I just read says that righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach and that tells me that God declares that whenever righteousness is making headway in a nation,

any nation, then that exalts that nation under the sovereign hand of God. This tells me that God is sovereignly involved in all the nations of the world including my nation. If God is involved with the nations then why would I as a Christian not be involved in all the nations of the world? I.E. the Great Commission where we are to go into all the world to make disciples of all the nation and why would I not have a priority commitment to my own nation? Does that stand under the scrutiny of the Scripture and the history of the church? I believe it does.

What was the nation that was ruling and reigning in the days of Jesus? That nation was the Roman Empire. Jesus didn't say that now that you're following Me just forget that empire, no He said to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render to God the things that are God's. Now that's a very loaded statement because Jesus in His Word teaches us that there would not be a Roman Empire or Caesar to honor if God didn't set them up because every authority stands by the hand of God. That is not putting Caesar and God on the same footing because the rest of Scripture says that Caesar only stands as long as God appoints him to stand but because God has appointed him and if I am in that then I am to appropriately render to Caesar what is to be rendered unless this delegated established authority by God attempts to usurp the authority of God. Therefore Caesar's authority stands because God has placed it and part of my honoring God is to honor the authority God has placed me in, in a nation. If that authority attempts to usurp God's authority then I must obey God and not man. Jesus is teaching us this Biblically informed dynamic of Biblical patriotism even to something such as a Roman Empire.

The Apostle Paul does this in the context not only in the Roman Empire but in his own nation of Israel. Here is the Apostle to the Gentiles. Here is the Apostle whose heart and calling is to take the Gospel to the nations and yet this same Apostle will look to his own nation and when speaking to God's plan for that nation he says in Romans 9:3-5, *[3] For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. [4] They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. [5] To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.* In other words, Paul would rather be accursed if it meant salvation for the brethren. Here he is speaking of his ethnic nation Israel.

Peter will be very pointed in this matter with this relationship that we have with the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world and that is where we'll spend some of our time in this study. The Apostle Paul is fully aware of his use and rights of a Roman citizen. There are three different occasions in the book of Acts where the Apostle Paul had been arrested, wrongly treated and in Philippi they just dismissed him. Paul tells them they need to apologize because they tried him without a trial, condemned him for his religious activity and they violated the rights he had as a Roman citizen. Is that the Apostle Paul petulantly wanting to pay back? No, he is doing this because he knows the church will be under attack in the Roman Empire so he is securing the rights for that church as far as he possibly can. He is acting as a Christian patriot in the Roman Empire to claim the extent of religious freedom that was available in the Roman Empire. He will do that three different times.

One time he did it to secure free passage for evangelistic engagement in Rome. He was actually going to be set free but said 'I'm a Roman citizen and you have to take me up to Rome to try this case. He starts a short term ministry there in Rome where he starts the Pauline prison ministry with all expenses paid by the Roman government because he continued to claim those rights that he had as a professing believer in the context of a Roman Empire. He didn't do it for

himself but for the sake of other believers and the sake of extending the Gospel. He knew this Gospel was going to go throughout the Roman Empire. He was going to secure its footing in the Roman Empire as far as he is able to do it. He is acting as a Christian patriot.

There are other instances throughout history. There are the reformers, Calvin, Luther, Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley and one I love is the Scottish reformer John Knox who had been mentored in Geneva under Calvin for a number of years before he went back to Scotland. Was it abundantly clear these people had their eyes on the whole world for the Gospel of the Kingdom? Absolutely but they saw no conflict in terms for their own love for their own nation. Calvin risked his life on eight different occasions to go to France while the new orders of the Roman Catholic church were trying and putting to death the reformers and pastors in France where eventually there was a full out assault on the French Huguenot church. Calvin not only trained 1300 missionaries and sent them to France but he went there sometimes openly, sometimes clandestinely to be with them in the midst of their struggles. It doesn't mean he didn't love other nations for he sent the first mission team to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1562. He had a heart for the world but it didn't mean he didn't have a deep desire to reach his own country of France with the Gospel.

There is John Knox who will not stop when he goes back there after his tutelage. He is known for saying 'Give me Scotland or I die!' Did he not want the world for Christ? Absolutely but that did not mean he could not have a prioritized commitment to his own nation. One of the most moving times in my life is when I stood at Oxford University at a street that has in stone a marble cross which is the very place in 1566 Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and not many months later Thomas Cranmer would be burned to death. Nicholas Ridley actually had to beg for the fire to be started three times. When I have stood there I cannot but think of their sacred words. Nicholas Ridley says to his captor 'tie the bonds tight for I don't want to leave my post in the moment of trial. Hugh Latimer says to his dear friend Ridley, 'be of good cheer master Ridley for today you and I shall light a candle for Christ that shall never be put out in all of England.' Do you see their heart for their nation or were they just misguided fools? Was that Biblically directed patriotism that stands not in opposition of the Gospel to all the nations but stands with integrity with our commitment to our own nation?

It is not all that easy to do it because you have the two ditches. We are not bringing Christianity to bear for the cause of Nationalism in America but we're bringing Christianity to bear out of our love for our country to America. It is not the handmaiden of America. It is the glorious message of the Gospel of the Kingdom that there is a King calling America to bow to this King, to surrender to this King. What does it mean to have a government that is Biblically framed to do the job the King says the government is to do, which is not to be the church nor to be the family but to be the protector of the unalienable rights that God has given and as a government that is your responsibility. It didn't stop with the reformation, did it?

Look at our own country. We see a declaration of independence and this marvelous moment of 1776. The Declaration of Independence is delivered to the English parliament and they stand up and read it. A parliamentarian named Horace Walpole stood up and said 'Cousin America has just run off with a Presbyterian parson and that's the end of it.' I would love for someone to say that America has run off with a Presbyterian parson and I would settle for a Baptist parson but there aren't many such parsons. That was not just a slogan for Walpole was speaking of a real man, a real parson named John Witherspoon who was the only clergyman who signed the Declaration of Independence but thirteen of his students also signed it. One of them becomes of the architect of the Constitution named James Madison. Benjamin Rush was another

one Witherspoon effected and Rush was vitally involved in the development of this nation. That is what they did, now what do we do?

On the one hand we have the jingoists that puts Christianity beneath America and on the other hand we have those with a misguided arrogance that will not speak to America and think that is what honors Christ and our allegiance to Him. The Bible solves this for us and I would like to give you a principles from God's Word on this. Let's start by looking at I Peter 2:13–17 which says [13] *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, [14] or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. [15] For this is the **will of God**, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (In the context of a government that is supposed to do its job then we are to honor it and respond to it.) [16] Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. [17] Honor **everyone**. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

I am to honor everyone but there is another level of relationship that I have with my brothers and sisters in Christ. God is the only One I stand in awe of, the Triune God, the God of glory. It is not a threat to the God who places people in authority to honor them in their position of authority. I want to give you four principles concerning this but I am really giving you one principle and am fleshing it out with three others. So here is the first principle. The first principle is that your identity in life as a believer is your relationship with God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer/Provider (His Providence). We live in a culture today where people are searching for their identity to the point that they say their identity is their sexual promiscuity or their sexual perversion or the color of their skin or their nation or this or that.

So what does it mean that my identity is directly related to God as my Creator? Because God is my Creator I know that I am made in the image of God. I have assigned dignity given to me because God made me in His image and all of Adam's race stand with the imprint of Imago Deo which means they are bearing the image of God. That governs all that I am, all that have and all that I have to be. This governs the way I treat or see other people. It governs my initial world and life view – how I see myself, my spouse, my children, my brothers and sisters, believers and unbelievers. I see them out of my relationship with God who is my Creator. I do not need to fall for the siren traps of Satan that have come all the way from the Garden like you are what you because of your sexuality, your gender, your money, your possessions, your pedigree. No I am what I am first of all by creation. This is who God has made me. He has made man in His image, male and female and both are required to properly reflect God. That is the way my identity begins – with a relationship with God as my Creator.

Secondly, is my identity builds on my relationship with God as my Redeemer. I am what I am by the grace of God. He has saved me from my sins. He has bought me. I am sprinkled clean with His blood. I am indwelt by His Spirit. I am directed by His Word. I am a citizen of the Kingdom because the King died for me, rose again and has brought me to Himself.

Thirdly, my identity builds on my relationship with God as my Provider, my Sustainer. He upholds me by the Word of His power. He has declared not that all things are good but that all things work together for good to those who know Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Therefore my singular, supreme, governing allegiance and affection is to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Now I want to walk you through these three one more time in the context of the Trinity. God is my Creator, why? It is because the Father authored my creation. The Son accomplished my creation and everything was made through Him, by Him and for Him. The Holy Spirit has

ordered His creation and has hovered over the creation to order it. So I exist by the work of a Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as my Creator made in His image.

I am saved, redeemed because God is my Redeemer. The Father has authored my salvation. The Son has accomplished my salvation and the Holy Spirit has and is applying my salvation.

Thirdly, I am who I am because God is my Provider, my Sustainer. The Father has declared His goodness for me. His plans for me is not for my demise but even in a broken world and a broken body His plans for me are for my benevolent blessing to His glory. Therefore His Son now intercedes for me and the Holy Spirit is within me interceding for me with groanings too deep to be uttered. That is the governing identity in my life.

Because of that supreme allegiance, affection and adoration of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, that governs everything else that becomes a part of my identity in my life. Because He is my Creator I now have an identity with a family. I have an allegiance and an affection for my family (and extended family) and it is governed by my allegiance and affection to God as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer but that does not mean there are secondary allegiances and affections that are defined by that allegiance and affection. The very first one is the institution of creation itself which is the family. So I will love my family – my wife, my children and my grandchildren.

My family is not in rivalry to my affection and adoration to God who made me, saved me and sustained me but it is an outworking of that because I am bringing that identity where God saved me, made me and sustained me to do this and my first point in human relationships is my family. My allegiance and affection to God is what informs my affection for my family and that's why my family's name is important to me. I stand in absolute amazement and thanksgiving that my father allowed me to have his name and he had his father's name. I am grateful that I was able to pass my name to my son. Our name is to be defined to the glory of God and it is to be more prized than gold or silver. So I have in the name of my devotion to Christ a devotion to my family out of the creating work of God in my life. He created me through my family, to have this family and to minister to this family for His glory as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

The second place we see this outworking is the informed allegiance and affection we for His church. Because God created me I love my family with the redeeming, sustaining power He brings into my life. Because God saved me then I love my family in the context of His family, the church. Just as God created the family He created His family as the institution of redemption, as Redeemer so I love His church. I beg you, please do not use Christ's church, her vows, oaths, mission and calling as you would any other institution in this world. You have a right relationship from our text to every human institution but the church is not a human institution. It was bought by the blood of the Redeemer.

Ephesians 5:23 says [25] *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* If I love Jesus as my Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer then I will not only love the institution of creation, the family He put me in but I will love His Family, His church. I am grateful for all its blessings in my life but I don't rise up each day to get those blessings. I rise up each day and ask God, 'will You make me a blessing to Your church for this is Your church.' It doesn't belong to me or the members but it belongs to Jesus who purchased her with His blood, fills her with His Spirit and I love her vows, oaths, calling, mission and that it's the one institution that is headed to eternity.

I have the privilege to be a part of it and God will use me in it. I can't imagine anything more glorious and grateful. I even get the opportunity to be an ordained leader in it but you are an ordained member of her. We are members of the body of Christ and therefore we don't treat her lightly. She is a priority for this is Christ's church and Christ is not threatened by my allegiance to His church. Can I go off in the ditch of church idolatry? Yes, but the answer is not for me to treat her as an afterthought. The answer is for me as my identity to God as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer to love His church. Peter said 'I will love the brotherhood. Honor everyone (saved and unsaved).' I will love the brotherhood with that agape love that belongs to God in our relationship with Christ. It is a love that the world stands and marvels at saying 'my goodness how they love one another.' I love Thy church!

Thirdly God has an institution of His Providence and it's the nations. God has made the ethnos, the nations, therefore I will ask God to allow me to not only declare my relationship and its supremacy of affection and allegiance to Christ to my family and the church but also to my nation. My nation is America. If I had been born in another country it would be that country. So what does it mean for me to love my nation, not as what the government says that love is, but as Christ my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer who tell me to love that nation? So how do we love our nation?

It is by the Great Commission. We bring the Gospel of the Kingdom in worship, evangelism, and discipleship to this nation. We bring the salt and light to the Kingdom of God to this nation and that's how we love this nation. We honor her customs, those who died for us in the armed forces that we can have these freedoms that are God given and providentially protected by a government and we will give honor, tax and custom to whom honor, tax, and custom is due. When we love this nation we'll not only do that but we will love this nation the way our King wants us to love this nation which is to bring the Gospel of the Kingdom in Word and deed to this nation.

We not only love this nation with the Great Commission but we love this nation with the great commandment so that righteousness becomes a part of the public square and public theology because God exalts the righteousness of a nation but sin becomes a reproach (Proverbs 14:34). So God's institution of Providence is the nation and it is in that nation that I want to bring the declaration of my allegiance and affection to Christ with a Biblically informed allegiance and affection to that nation.

I have not exalted Christ by acting as if I am not a part of this nation. Yes I am exile and I am fully aware that I am a sojourner in this world. I am fully aware that I am headed to eternity where these nations will not exist where they exist today but as I exist in this nation God has called me to make disciples of all the nations and to love my neighbor as myself as I love the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind. Therefore I want to be engaged in a nation to pray for her, minister to her and to do evangelism within her, to plant and revitalize churches within her. With the nation we come with the plan of the Gospel of the Kingdom to that nation while we give honor, respect, tax, and custom to whom honor, respect, tax and custom is due.

The amazing thing is what is this nation? Here is where our forbearers have done something for us that was done imperfectly but it was still done and we need to build on it. They established a nation that they recognized would be a nation of immigrants, multi-racial but have a unified culture. E Pluribus Unum which means 'out of many, one.' They didn't start with the diversity to negotiate the unity but they started with the unity that reached to the diversity. They established the center to broaden the circumference and those basic declarations were not racial identity. No, our terrible sin was chattel slavery and I wish that somehow our forbearers had

handled it upfront. I am grateful they were smart enough not to do what they originally were going to do which was to enshrine in that declaration the inalienable rights of life, liberty and property. They didn't do that because they knew they were in a nation that believed human beings would be property, and to enshrine property would be to enshrine that chattel slavery. So what they put in the place of property was the pursuit of happiness.

Notice that they didn't put 'life, liberty and happiness' for we don't have an unalienable right to happiness because that's a gift of grace. The unalienable right was the pursuit of happiness and it is that, that would be defined by our forbearers under the influence of Christians (Witherspoon, Madison, Rush, John Adams and others) imperfectly that in the center would be put life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all men, created in the image of God. Thus comes a unique experiment – a nation defined by its ethnos and not its racial ethnicity. Therefore I believe this nation is worth loving, pledging my allegiance to under my supreme allegiance to Christ and having affection for, informed by my affection for Christ just as my forbearers did the same.

Psalms 16:6 says *[6] The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.* If I had been born in any other nation I would have attempted to bring Biblical principles to bear upon my love for that, my homeland of that nation but this is where God and His Providence has placed me in the institution of Providence called the United States of America. It is a very unique situation where we declared our freedom with the Declaration of Independence and then something extraordinary, unlike the revolution of the French that went off into anarchy in their declared freedom, happened where we actually went into order. Why? It is because we followed the Declaration of Independence with something called the Constitution where the law is king. So instead of anarchy we had ordered freedom.

Then we did something even more profound. We then put in place something called the Bill of Rights. The very first amendment was so crucial because there are six freedoms that are affirmed in that first amendment. The one that had the least debate because everyone knew it was the most foundational and fundamental was the free practice of religion. They knew that while the Declaration of Independence declared and won freedom, then the Constitution ordered freedom that without the Bill of Rights' free exercise of speech, press, practice of religion then freedom would never be matured and maintained. That became the defining dynamics of this country so that people would come and maybe in the first generation there would be a hyphenation like Irish-Americans, Keltic-Americans etc., but there was a whole desire to get rid of the hyphenation.

What does it mean to have a nation and to be an American? It is life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness under the law as Caesar so when I honor Caesar I will give respect to presidents, governors, justices, senators, and congressmen as magistrates who carry out their role but Caesar where God has providentially placed me is the Constitution of the United States because my forbearers were engaged for King Jesus, to frame a government, not to be the family or the church but to do what a government is supposed to do. Thus it is that, that I have been called to love therefore in the coming days I am praying for the family and the church to do that revival by God's grace of bubbling up and the kings and presidents will hear about it and issue decrees to get on board with that revival just like the King of Nineveh did in the days of Jonah.

Something else I will be doing is that I will be ready to speak, if necessary suffer but with Paul and Peter I will affirm and speak to the freedoms that will bless my children and my grandchildren but I will not suffer as a Nationalist nor will I suffer as an isolationist. I will suffer

if need be as a Christian made in the image of God, redeemed by the grace of God and providentially in this nation so I will love her (this nation) for King Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Father would You guide and direct our thoughts that we would not be prey to those who would use Christianity for a nation but for Christians who will be used of Christ for this nation? God, would You bring a revival and a Gospel awakening? Please bring a Gospel harvest. In the meantime would You also help us to be faithful? We are who we are because You made us in Your image. We are who we are by the grace of God because You redeemed us. We are who we are because You sustained are very breath. Therefore we will love You by loving our family, Your church and the nation where You have planted us from which we send the Gospel to all the nations, in Jesus' Name, King Jesus, Amen.