

Sacrifice, Slavery, and the Pursuit of Holiness

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

And with one fell swoop of the pen, American Christianity was set on a self-destruct course. The crack in the foundations of Christianity in America didn't happen in the 1960s. They happened in 1776.

Don't get me wrong; I love my country. Even though I struggle with many aspects of our history, I'd rather be an American than a citizen of any other nation on earth. However, our declaration of independence from Great Britain has paved the way for the declaration of independence from the Great God.

As Americans, we see life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as rights that cannot be taken away by anyone. Perhaps in a civil society they are good guides. However, when we allow these to guide our spirituality, they are destructive.

America says it is my right to protect my life. God, however, says, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25, ESV). And again He says, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10, ESV). And finally we are told that those who conquer the dragon are those who “loved not their lives even unto death” (Revelation 12:11, ESV). America says pursue life; God says pursue sacrifice.

America says liberty is the most basic right we have. God, however, says, “Present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” (Romans 8:19, ESV). And again, He highlights that though we are free from sin (the issue about which every passage that promotes freedom is talking about) we “have become slaves of God” (Romans 8:22, ESV). Have you ever noticed how the New Testament authors repeatedly referred to themselves? “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus” (Romans 1:1, ESV). “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:1, ESV). “Paul, a servant of God” (Titus 1:1, ESV). “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1, ESV). “Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:1, ESV). “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:1, ESV). Don't be confused, this word for “servant” is also the word for “slave.” America says pursue liberty; God says pursue slavery.

America says the greatest protected right is our pursuit of happiness. God, however, says, “Pursue...holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, NKJV). I certainly believe if we pursue holiness, we will get happiness in the mix, or rather joy (see Galatians 5:22). However, I'm equally convinced if we pursue happiness, we won't get either one. In fact, run a search for “happy” and “happiness” in the New Testament and you'll discover God seems to have a complete lack of interest in how happy we are (and please don't mix up the word “blessed” with “happy” as so many do). He doesn't seem to give us one single instruction designed to make us happy. Holiness is His concern. America says pursue happiness; God says pursue holiness.

So, the tough question we American Christians have to ask is which is going to be more important to us, being American or being Christian. (Hint: Read Philippians 3:20.)