



"A love for tradition has never weakened a nation, indeed it has strengthened nations in their hour of peril."

—Winston S. Churchill

03-Jul-26

Is Patriotism Biblical?

Tomorrow, the nation will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of its founding in 1776. It will be a day of patriotism—wearing red, white, and blue, parades, barbecues, music, fireworks, baseball, political speeches, and other traditional expressions of pride in the United States of America. Except perhaps for a firecracker accident or being hit by a foul ball, all harmless fun, right? (This essay will not deal with concerns about the [Sabbath](#), on which July 4 falls this year.)

Some Christians frown on national patriotism—"affection and vigorous support for one's country"—because of the church's teaching on spiritual citizenship. In [Philippians 3:20](#), the apostle Paul clearly writes that "our citizenship is in heaven." He says later in [Colossians 1:13](#) that the Father "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His [love](#)." [Jesus](#) Himself explains that, though we are in [the world](#), we are not of it ([John 17:14-16](#); see 15:19; 18:36). The apostle John echoes our Savior's teaching by commanding Christians, "Do not love the world or the things in the world" ([I John 2:15](#)).

In addition, some say that patriotism is a form of pride, making it an obvious [sin](#). This argument, however, teeters on a semantic seesaw. The sin of pride can be defined as "having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one's importance." It is placing oneself before [God](#), as [Satan](#) did, which is idolatry. However, pride over another's achievements is a kind of deep pleasure, satisfaction, or admiration, which are not sinful except when taken to an extreme. One can legitimately be proud of a daughter who crushes her flute recital or a son who pitches a no-hitter in Little League. In this way, patriotism as admiration for one's country falls in the second, non-sinful category.

Similarly, other anti-patriotism Christians go straight to saying it is rank idolatry, breaking the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me" ([Exodus 20:3](#)). Of course, this argument can be used against anything practiced in excess. However, many normally permissible activities can slip into idolatry when they become the primary focus of a person's life, displacing God's preeminent place in their priorities. By itself and practiced in a God-honoring manner, patriotism for one's native land is not sinful.

The first-century church faced a similar question. What should a Christian's posture be toward the nations and governments of this world? Most of the earliest converts came from Judaism. How should they respond to the Jewish rulers, especially the office of the high priest? Recall that it was the office of the high priest that sent out the likes of Saul to haul Christians to prison or worse ([Acts 9:1-2](#)).

Other early Christians were called out of paganism, but they had to deal with secular rulers, especially those who were officials of the Roman Empire, which dominated the regions where Christianity soon spread. Should they obey the often cruel and oppressive dictates of the emperor or his appointees?

At that time, emperor worship, known as the Imperial Cult, was sometimes brutally enforced. Romans regarded sacrificing to the emperor as a test of loyalty to the state. Refusing to do so was considered impiety toward the empire's gods, thus endangering the empire's welfare by angering those gods. Christians, of course, believe that there is only one God and that to worship another in any way was idolatry, a sacrilege against Him. Yet, in various

places around the empire, zealous officials occasionally rounded up Christians as traitors to Rome for refusing to offer sacrifices to the emperor. Those who did not recant and refused to offer the sacrifice faced capital punishment as the penalty for treason.

The apostles, then, needed to expand on Jesus' teaching and instruct church members on what their relationship to human government should be. Jesus had spoken about going the extra mile when forced by a Roman soldier to carry a burden for him ([Matthew 5:41](#)), implying compliance with onerous laws, and also about paying taxes to both the Temple and pagan governments (see [Matthew 17:24-27](#); [22:15-22](#)), showing that paying taxes was a duty of citizenship and submission to legal authority. He also submitted to Pilate's authority to crucify Him, giving the ultimate example of submitting to human government (see [John 18:28-36](#)).

Both Paul and Peter wrote instructions to their congregations about this subject. Paul famously writes to the Romans, who were right at the heart of the empire, about submitting to government ([Romans 13:1-7](#)). He teaches that God had appointed the authorities over them (verse 1) and that they should render to all their due taxes, customs, fear, and honor (verse 7).

The apostle Peter does the same in [I Peter 2:13-17](#), commanding Christians to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good" ([I Peter 2:13-14](#)). He finishes much as Paul does: "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

The key point from the apostles' instruction is that Christians should not have an adversarial relationship with the governments over them. They are to be model citizens, conforming to its laws and customs in every way *as long as those laws and practices do not contradict God's higher laws and way of life*. God expects this of us. Peter writes, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" ([I Peter 2:15](#)). In other words, the Christian's exemplary conduct would show that true Christianity produced loyal, productive, level-headed citizens, not the traitors and weirdos the ignorant rumors depicted.

In [II Corinthians 5:20](#), Paul gives the principle of being "[ambassadors for Christ](#)," which parallels Peter's statement in [I Peter 2:15](#) (see also [I John 4:17](#), "as He is, so are we in this world"). While this concept, coupled with the fact that our citizenship is in heaven, provides Christians with a new and higher identity and allegiance, it does not altogether remove their previous ones. An individual born in America is still an American after he is called and converted. His being a child of God imposes new obligations and restrictions on him, which he must prioritize, but he can still love his native land and want the best for it without contradicting his ultimate loyalty to God.

With His calling, God does not wipe out our natural affections and loyalties. He simply demands that He become first in our minds and hearts. As long as we love God first and foremost, thanking Him for His manifold blessings, we can express our patriotism for the nation and celebrate its achievements without guilt.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

New Transcripts

[1882: Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment!](#)

Given by Martin G. Collins on 27-Jun-26

[BS-AM10: Amos \(Part Ten\)](#)

Given by John W. Ritenbaugh on 17-May-88

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Summertime Soldier and Sunshine Patriotism](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Those who signed the Declaration of Independence put their treasure and lives in danger, many dying as traitors and outcasts. All of the signers realized that they were lighting the fuse, freeing the colonies from a tyrannical enslaving power. We must also be prepared to put our lives,

treasure, and honor on the line, pledging everything we are and everything we have, picking up our cross daily, declaring our independence from carnality, evil and bondage to sin. The stakes are higher for us than for the signers of the Declaration of Independence. True godly patriotism cannot be forced; Christ voluntarily and willingly laid down His life for the flock. Godly patriotism is built and sustained by truth which issues forth in love, requiring a lifetime of spiritual struggle and sacrifice, patterned after the substitutionary sacrifice of our Elder Brother. We must say no to self-centeredness, bearing the pain and shame of this lifestyle Christ has given us, continuing to trust Him in all situations, serving our brethren in His behalf. Paradoxically, laying down our lives in the service of God the Father and Christ the Son, suffering hardship, and struggling with our carnal nature, actually makes us free. Ironically, preparing for spiritual struggle and warfare must take place in an environment of peace.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Our Heavenly Citizenship](#)

by Austin Del Castillo

It is natural to want to "do our part" when we see the nation of our birth reel from internal dissent, our cities burning, our leadership incompetent. Yet, God has called His elect to a higher loyalty: to Himself and His Kingdom. Austin Del Castillo maintains that members of the church must focus on their identity in Christ and producing spiritual fruit even during such tumultuous times.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 03-Jul-26) will be **Absalom: A Study in Narcissism**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday (EST)** and all day Saturday.

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