



"The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good."

—Ann Landers

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America First?

Most of us have heard country singer Lee Greenwood's most famous song, "Proud to Be an American." It is usually a staple of Independence Day festivities, especially in the South, and it gets raucous cheers from the crowds. Americans "from sea to shining sea" feel a stirring of patriotism when they hear the song lauding our fallen soldiers and our constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

We may be proud to be Americans, but the problem today is that we are often prouder to be something else. It does not matter what the "something else" is. Whatever it is, we place that allegiance before our national one. There is nothing wrong with this if our first allegiance is to [Christ](#) and to our families. The problem begins when our first allegiance is to something far less important and far more political.

For instance, too many people are first Republicans, Democrats, or Libertarians before being Americans, and their party affiliation blinds them to the good of the nation. Instead, such people see everything through the prism of their party, and it is not long before they begin to make decisions based on political expediency rather than to make real strides in the

particular area under discussion. The California Republican gubernatorial race is a prime example. Arnold Schwarzenegger sports an "R" after his name, but his positions on critical issues are neither traditionally Republican nor good for Californians. However, because he wears the "right" jersey, California Republicans are willing to back him so that their party gains the Governor's Mansion—and possibly a few extra seats in the Assembly in the next election.

For other people, their racial identity is their primary allegiance—white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Arab, etc.—it does not matter. Such people carry permanent chips on their shoulders, constantly griping about the injustices and discriminations they face because of the place of their birth, color of their skin, the shape of their eyes, or the peculiarity of their speech. Even when these individuals are born-and-bred Americans, they see the country in shades of color rather than in terms of citizenship and potential. Though the movement has left the front pages of our newspapers, white supremacists fit this category, [coveting](#) America for themselves only and not as it was founded: as a nation of refuge for all freedom seekers.

Other people identify themselves primarily as teachers, longshoremen, textile workers, communications workers, autoworkers, steelworkers, coal miners, pipe fitters, etc. Their particular industry, they feel, is worthy of all the money and benefits that it can garner. This means, of course, that more goodies will trickle down to them in the form of higher wages, better healthcare, and more secure and lucrative severance and retirement packages. It has led to higher prices across the economy (inflation) and thus to industry's inability to compete internationally. Here in the Carolinas, for example, the textile industry is languishing at least partially because companies can no longer afford their workers!

We politely call this phenomenon "self-interest," but it is in fact selfishness. It is looking out for Number One at the expense of the other guy; it demonstrates the attitude of "the nation can hang, for all I care!" It is an obvious symptom of a nation disintegrating into ever-smaller pieces until, like ancient Israel, "everyone [does] what [is] right in his own eyes" ([Judges 21:25](#)). At that point, the nation no longer exists, just millions of individual, independent, autonomous entities.

In a somewhat analogous situation, John the Baptist was asked, "What shall we do then?" He replied:

He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise. . . . [To tax collectors:] Collect no more than what is appointed for you. . . . [To soldiers:] Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages. ([Luke 3:10-14](#))

In sum, we should 1) provide for the needy, 2) not take advantage of our position, and 3) live within our means. We can further narrow this to "[love your neighbor as yourself](#)" ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

America may be the greatest nation on earth, but the seeds of its decline and fall are already evident in the selfish behavior of its citizens. If enough people truly sought the nation's good, we could all be proud to be Americans.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Liberty vs. Independence](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Although we, through Christ's sacrifice, have been freed from the curse or death penalty of the law, we have not, as most Protestants believe, been freed from law keeping. We have been liberated from the degeneration of sin, the fear of death, corruption, and the elements of this world. If we live righteously, through the power of God's Spirit (the mind of Christ), we remain free from sin. We are delivered from the bad bondage of sin (leading to death) to a good bondage of righteousness (leading to life), becoming indentured servants until our death, at which time we become transformed into God's spiritual offspring. As slaves of righteousness, we are dependent upon our master. As followers of Christ, we are not independent but interdependent and interconnected as Christ's body. Freedom comes from surrendering to God's will.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Sharing Our Lives at the Feast](#)

by Mark Schindler

The Feast of Tabernacles is a wonderful gift God has given us to spend time with each other, really sharing ourselves. Through the stories of our experiences, both good and bad, we can be great sources of wisdom and encouragement, spurring our brethren to greater faith and zeal during times of trial. Mark Schindler provides a few examples of how this can be done.

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