



"Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition."
—Thomas Jefferson

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Dependence Day

This weekend, Americans will celebrate the 229th anniversary of the nation's stated independence from England. On that singular day, July 4, 1776, the original thirteen colonies declared their autonomy from the British Crown because of grievances against King George. The colonists saw their individual rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of property" being overruled by an expansive government thousands of miles away. They were willing to die for the chance to live their lives without being regulated at every turn. Liberty, freedom, independence, and democracy were the words of the day, and they have been the rallying cry for America ever since—for better or worse.

The Founders' vision was a republic with a limited federal government, with most of the power left to the states—and to the individual. They knew at the beginning that the success or failure of this grand experiment was largely up to the citizenry: By reducing the Federal power, the individual was intended to step in and fill the vacuum. The Founders were not prescribing or advocating anarchy, but rather a system where the central government could afford to be small because the individual would be governing himself. They knew that it would only work as long as everyone involved was absolutely

dedicated to morality. If corrupt leaders began usurping more authority, or if the citizens abrogated their responsibilities in governing themselves, expecting the government to provide more and do more, the Republic's days were numbered.

The Founders were optimists. The weakness with the system of government they developed was the same weakness inherent in the Old Covenant: the people ([Hebrews 8:8](#), 10). The people did not, and do not, have the heart to govern themselves. Over the years, the size, scope, and authority of the government have only increased, and the citizens have become only more dependent. The Founders had the right idea, for self-governance is indeed what [God](#) prescribes. But it is the character and quality of the *self* that is doing the governing that matters, and no system of man will ever overcome the problem of the "deceitful . . . and desperately wicked" human heart ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)).

King George's power and authority cannot begin to compare to the government that [Jesus Christ](#) will establish when He returns—"of His Kingdom there will be no end" ([Luke 1:33](#)). After His resurrection, Christ told His disciples that "*all* authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" ([Matthew 28:18](#)). His government is anything but limited! However, it will be only those individuals who choose to govern themselves—after being given a heart to make it possible—who will be citizens of the Kingdom and rule with Jesus Christ.

American citizens have become increasingly dependent upon the government for programs, subsidies, welfare, and regulation in every conceivable facet of life—and in the other [nations of Israel](#), the dependency and collectivism is even greater! It is easy to tally the expansion of government and the loss of individual liberty, but during this season, perhaps it would be more profitable to contemplate our own level of self-governance:

- How willingly are we yielding to God?
- Do we wait for Him to act dramatically before following His instructions?
- Do we have to see an explicit "thus sayeth the LORD" before we will modify our behavior?

- Do we expect God to do things for us that we can—and should—do for ourselves?
- Are we determined to live by every word that proceeds from God, or just the ones that are convenient?
- Are we "prov[ing] all things" and "hold[ing] fast that which is good" ([1 Thessalonians 5:21](#)), or taking somebody else's word that something is true?
- Is prayer and Bible study a priority each day, or does our communication with God wax and wane?
- Do we behave differently depending on who is or is not around?
- Can God depend on us to follow His way, regardless of the cost?

God, through Solomon, tells us, "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother" ([Proverbs 10:1](#)). God is our Father, and He is training His children to be wise—to make the right application of the knowledge and understanding He imparts. Just as human parents raise their children with the goal of preparing them to be on their own some day, God is raising us to be able to take on more and more responsibility. There are things that we cannot do for ourselves, just as there are things we parents must do for our children as they grow and mature. But a major goal of childrearing—whether ours or God's—is to produce self-governing citizens who do not require heavy-handed authority to ensure that they are moving in the right direction.

As the citizens of the United States beg, in various ways, for more government, the nation is sliding back toward the state of dependence from whence it began. There is little anyone can do to stop it. Members of the church of God, though, can learn from this failing experiment, and let it drive us to become self-governing citizens of the [Kingdom of God](#).

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Self-Government and Responsibility \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A major distinguishing characteristic of mankind is his free moral agency, presenting him with choices and the right to make decisions. We need free moral agency to be transformed into God's image. The volition to do right has to come from the core of our character or nature. Paradoxically, the way to maximum freedom is to yield to God's way of doing things. Unless one has the Spirit of God, he cannot exercise the necessary internal control to be subject to the government of God. Even though the church is not the government of God (John 18:36; I Corinthians 15:50), we need to respect the ministry as well as lay members, being subject to one another (I Corinthians 11:1). The operation of God's government absolutely depends upon each person governing himself, never going beyond the parameters of the authority God has given him.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Do You Do in the Dark?](#)

by Mike Ford

Character has been defined as "what you do in the dark." It is what you are when no one else can see you. Mike Ford uses the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house to extract some lessons about character.

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