

A Lesson From History

Will We Learn That Lesson?

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 15-Jan-11; Sermon #1028c

It was Abraham Lincoln, our 16th President, who stated during a speech that the nation "has government of the people, by the people and for the people." In other words, the Founding Father's intention was that the governing body of this nation would be the people themselves.

That seems to be clear enough, but it becomes even clearer when one reads the first sentence of the preamble of the Constitution of the United States, which states,

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice and ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

What or who is it that establishes constitutions for a nation? Governments do that. Who does preamble state established the Constitution of the United States? The first seven words give the answer: the people of the United States. That ought to be very clear. The Founding Fathers said that the government would be the people of the United States. The Founding Fathers intended this very clearly in actual fact. Today, though, almost 225 years after that preamble was written, it is very clear that the government and the people governed are two separate entities. From a federal standpoint, it is fairly clear that the Founding Fathers intended that we be a self-governing people.

John Adams, was surely one of the nation's Founding Fathers. He, perhaps more than any of those men directly involved in the founding of the nation, understood that what had been embarked upon was being built on dangerously shifting sand. He warned by saying this: "Democracy never last long. It's soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

He could say such a thing because the United States was not the world's first nation to experiment with some form of democracy. I do not know whether you were aware, but historians tell us that world history reveals that the average life of a democracy is 200 years. Why? What happens? Again we can turn to John Adams for an incisive quote. This quote does not tell you the entire story, but I believe it does focus on the central

issue as to where the problem lies that brings about the death of democracy. He said, "Our constitution is made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." He points to a change in the citizens' beliefs and conduct, and in the United States that change in thinking involves religion and morality.

Regarding the United States Constitution, it is established that both the government and the governed are essentially one and the same people. This system will work exceptionally well, but only as long as the individual citizen governs himself. Now, what has happened? In one sense, the answer is quite simple. Gradually, over a period of time, the individual citizens' beliefs regarding religion and morality, and therefore his attitudes and conduct, have changed, and he has slowly withdrawn from governing himself, and he abandons the governing to others.

Thus, we have evolved into a them-and-us circumstance. The government has become a separate entity, and it now clearly holds power over the governed, and now it is almost daily that they increase their grip over the individual citizens' lives. Our liberties disappear almost daily, and the Constitution is ignored, except by the few who care. It has gotten so bad that a very large portion of the administration—those in higher offices—no longer care what the Constitution says.

I'm going to give you two quotes from former Supreme Court justices. The first is from Justice Charles Evans Hughes. He said this in 1907. Listen carefully: "We are under a Constitution, but the Constitution is what the judges say it is, and the judiciary is the safeguard of our liberty and of our property under the Constitution."

Now, fast-forward 63 years to 1970, and Justice Hugo Black said this: "Our Constitution was not written in the sands to be washed away by each wave of new judges blown in by each successive political wind that brings new political administrations into temporary power."

That was a little bit more convoluted, but what he said was this: The Constitution is not *supposed* to change. But I ask another question: What if justices' beliefs and morality change? They have. This truly became visible in the 1930s. It accelerated greatly between the 1950s and 1980s. By 2010, the Constitution is virtually ignored. Whether you realize it or not, this nation is within a gnat's eyelash of being a dictatorship. We now have a government merely by executive orders. Regulations flow from minor departments without going through Congress. The "multitude of counsel" available from Congress is virtually ignored, and it is rapidly becoming a useless appendage because the citizens have abandoned their responsibilities and aren't really participating.

A Lesson From History by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

You saw an anomaly in this recent election, where people finally took the bull by the horns and the people who drove that were the Tea Party guys. But what's happening to the general public? Their attentions are elsewhere.

What application does this historical reality have for us? It is a warning not to let what has happened to America's citizens happen to us. God is testing us, even as He did the children of Israel in the wilderness to see whether they would believe and trust Him. *He* is our government. His word is our constitution, and His word, like Himself, is absolutely true. He is our Lawmaker and our Judge. His law is perfect, converting the soul. His morality will never change. He said, "I am God. I change not." It is written, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever." And we, the citizens of His family Kingdom, are the only variable in the picture.

So the question is, will our beliefs and trust in Him and His constitution solidify and grow stronger, or will they weaken and perhaps fail? We have everything to gain. We could possibly lose everything. We must not allow to happen to us what the American people permitted to happen to them. And we must make every effort to bear our responsibility as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We must not allow our attention to waiver from our goal.