

One Nation Under God, with Liberty and Justice For All

As a very young child I can remember being taught to stand at attention, to speak with reverence, and placing our hands over our hearts to pledge our allegiance to "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Life seemed much simpler back then. I didn't know anybody who didn't believe in God. There are now many who want to remove under God and who will not show the respect to the pledge or National Anthem. Let us reflect on what, "One nation under God, with liberty and justice for all", really means and what implications they might have for our life together.

1st One Nation Under God: Under God is a matter of humility. We need to be under God because we need somebody superior to us and to whom we are accountable. If you are under God you are not God — something everyone holding office needs to consider. If you are under God, you are answerable to God, something all of us would be wise to remember. If you are under God, you are not the master of your own fate, the captain of your own soul. You are a citizen under orders, subject to God's control. We need to remember today that we are a country rooted in "freedom of religion, not freedom from religion." Reverence of God not Avoidance of God. If we declare our independence of God we doom ourselves to the demise of our own folly!

As the founders of this country struggled to frame a constitution and found themselves bogged down in bitter dispute, it was old Ben Franklin, not a particularly religious man, who rose to his feet and said, "I have lived, sirs, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured in sacred writings that 'except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.'" With that they called a recess and the founders of this country got down on their knees to pray and when they arose they had the phrase "Epluribus Unum" — Out of many, one. Under God is a matter of goodness. America is great because America is good. If America ceases to be good, she will likewise cease to be great.

When reporters asked random people what Independence Day meant to them. I was shocked by the responses. "Freedom for me means that I can do as I please." One person elaborated on it. "I can do what I want, when I want, any way I want, any time I want. That's what freedom means to me." Is that why our forefathers and foremothers gave their lives so that people are free to wallow in their own drunken self-indulgence and do whatever they want to do, any time they want to do it, any way they choose to do it? Is that what freedom is all about?

Lord, save us from weak resignation to self-centeredness that is certain to destroy us all. Great nations ask not what looks good, feels good, makes good but great countries seek the "common good" of all those entrusted to its care. Of the fifty-six who signed the Declaration of Independence, five were captured by the British, tortured and executed; twelve had their homes burned; nine lost their lives in the war; and two lost their sons in the war. Goodness is not an easy road. It never has been. Goodness is an impossible thing to accomplish on our own. We can't do it ourselves. The Apostle Paul discovered that he could not make the grade of goodness on his own. Remember what he said in Romans 7. "The law is spiritual but I am not spiritual. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?" We need some help if we want to do good. If we can't help it, maybe it's time to make a declaration not of independence but of dependence—dependence on God who empowers us to be the kind of people He calls us to be.

2nd With Liberty and Justice for All: What God calls liberty and justice has nothing to do with courts and juries and everything to do with compassion and righteousness. Lady Liberty says it best, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these the homeless, the tempest tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

There is an old parody of Jesus' parable concerning the least of these which goes something like this: I was hungry and you formed a committee to discuss my hunger. I was thirsty and you debated the ethics of certain drinks. I was a stranger and you called the welcome wagon. I was naked and you questioned my morality. I was sick and you made health care unaffordable. I was in prison and you voted for capital punishment. Liberty and justice for all means that we seek to provide hope for the afflicted. *That means* a nation will be great when it remembers the least among us, the forgotten people in nursing homes, the forsaken people in long-term care facilities, the kid who thinks nobody cares, youth who feel despair. One Nation Under God, With Liberty And Justice For All can only be accomplished when we the Citizens of the United States of America do our individual part and stop waiting on bureaucracy to do what is the responsibility of every citizen with humility and resolve to live in a way that honors our creator.