

### Thank God For Our Country— 1 Thess 5:16-18

Let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Thess 5:16-18. I haven't preached on this weekend very much because it's normally part of our vacation. But it just so happens that I'm still here this year, and I'm glad I am.

Given the current events in our country, and the extreme ideologies being advocated, and the risk of despair in our souls, I think it's more important than ever that we go back to the basics and thank God for our country. Appreciate what we have. It's not a *popular* sentiment these days, but it sure is warranted and need.

➤ More importantly, it's a biblical command to give thanks. Found right here in 1 Thess 5. [16] *Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* Give thanks in all circumstances (18a).

Really Paul? All? *All* situations? *All* circumstances? Even bad ones? When people are pulling down statues? Or city councils are defunding their police forces? Or pundits are superimposing the sins of our past on the present, and condemning *everything* about our country? Give thanks even then?

Even when radicals are calling for the *overthrow* of our country? Or threatening to burn the system down?

Yes. Yes, yes, and yes. *Give thanks in all circumstances* it says. It's a command.

And, it's God's will for our lives. *Y18. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* This is what he desires and requires of us as followers of Christ. To thank him for the good, even in the midst of the bad. And when it comes to our country, there's no better time than Independence Day.

But don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting we stick our head in the sand. Or ignore the issues. I'm saying we should fold our hands in *prayer*, instead of wringing our hands in worry. I'm saying that while we address what's bad, we should thank God for what's good.

Starting with this:

**Thank God for a country founded on biblical principles instead of secular ones.**

Principles like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; instead of power, privilege, and the pursuit of pleasure. Which marked *most* countries in that day. At least for those in charge.

Thank God that wasn't us. Thank God for men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin. None of them by no means perfect, but all of them influenced and shaped by biblical principles, upon which they founded our country. Thank God for that.

➤ Not that we got it right, right away; applying those biblical principles to everyone. We didn't. It took 87 years, from 1776 to 1863, for *slavery* to be outlawed. For the lives of *African-Americans* to be valued just like those of *European-Americans*. 87 years. And another 101 years for those who are black, to be given full *civil* rights. Along with women and immigrants. 1964.

We didn't get it right, right away. We didn't apply the foundation equally. Especially in the South.

➤ But at least we got the foundation right, so that the rest could follow. So that we could and would, get it right.

If secular principles had been the foundation, like those advocated in the recent *1619 Project* – a false revision of history where *slavery* is said to be the reason for everything – if that were the case, we might still be *fighting* the battles for freedom and civil rights. Or not fighting them at all. (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/05/new-york-times-1619-project-wins-pulitzer-prize-for-agitprop/>)

But we did. And won. In large part, due to the biblical principles upon which our country is founded.

➤ *We hold these truths to be self-evident* [from the Declaration of Independence], *that all men are created equal*. It's a *biblical* principle. Having been created in God's image, with some of God's attributes, we are *equal* in his eyes. Just like *flowers* of his creation are equal in his sight, even though they're created with different colors and shapes.

And don't miss the next one. *That* [all men] *are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights*. That too is biblical. That God has given us certain rights and privileges that are inseparable from our humanity.

That's the idea of "unalienable." You can't have one without the other. You can't have the likeness of God and the *breath* of life, without the *right* to life. You can't have humanity, without liberty. At least you shouldn't. They go hand-in-hand.

➤ Through and through, our country was founded on biblical principles. From its very inception. And that doesn't even touch the biblical principles of private property, limited government, free markets, and democracy.

And if you wonder about that, you might pick up a copy of Wayne Grudem's **Christian Ethics**. It's only about 2 inches thick and 1300 pages☺, but it's invaluable on topics like this.

In the meantime, *give thanks*. First, for a country founded on *biblical* principles instead of secular ones.

Second . . .

**Thank God for a country that is democratic instead of dictatorial.**

Democratic, in that our government leaders are elected by the *people* instead of appointed by an aristocracy. Or self-appointed by a tyrant. Thank God for that.

Because it wasn't the norm back in the day. The city of Athens, in ancient Greece, B.C., had a democratic form of government. But when the United States was formed in 1776, it was called the "American Experiment" for a reason. Because there *were* no other democracies at that time. Not on a national scale. We were it. (Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 464)



And thank God *for* it. Because the alternatives aren't great. Where people have no say and few rights. Alternatives where those in power live high on the hog while those in subjection live in the troughs. Think North Korea.

Thank God for what we have. Thank God for this democratic experiment. An exceptional experiment that became the envy of the world. The model.

That's why, by 1950, 22 other countries followed suit and formed democracies of their own. And another 103 by 2015. So that today, about 56% of the world's population is governed by some form of democracy. (Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 464)

➤ And once again, it didn't just appear. Out of the soup of secularism. Or the Enlightenment. Our democracy started with the **Puritans** who came over on the Mayflower. And formed the *Mayflower Compact* in 1620, before they ever got off the ship. A commitment to democratic ideals, that formed the basis of our country.

Listen to some of what it says.

*We, whose names are underwritten . . . having undertaken for the Glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith . . . covenant and combine ourselves together . . . [and] do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal laws . . . unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.* (Mayflower Compact, 1620)

That's where our democracy started.

And 3 Centuries later, on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its signing, Calvin Coolidge, then the Governor of Massachusetts, said this about it:

*The compact which they signed was an event of the greatest importance. It was the foundation of liberty based on law and order, and that tradition has been steadily upheld.*

*They drew up a form of government which has been designated as the first real constitution of modern times. It was democratic, an acknowledgment of liberty under law and order, and the giving to each person the right to participate in the government, while they promised to be obedient to the laws.*

*But the really wonderful thing was that they had the power and strength of character to abide by it and live by it from that day to this.* (Calvin Coolidge, 1920)

The seeds of our democracy were sown in 1620. By Bible-believing, Bible-preaching Christians.

And 167 years later, in 1787, those seeds sprouted in the form of our Constitution. Establishing a form of government where we *elect* our leaders instead of having them forced on us.

➤ Thank God for that. Thank God for a country that is democratic instead of dictatorial; or socialist; or communist. Thank God we have the ability to change things via the voting booth instead of the gun barrel. Order instead of chaos. Debate instead of death.

Thank God. Because to the extent we fail to appreciate it, we will lose it.

Third . . .

**Thank God for a country that protects basic rights instead of restricting them.**

Rights like those found in the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to our Constitution. Including freedom of

religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. And our Civil Rights. The right to not be discriminated against because of your race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Thank God for a country that even grants such rights, let alone protects them.

Where would we be if we didn't have the right to exercise our religious beliefs? Openly and publicly. I'll tell you where: China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Myanmar. We'd be secretly assembling in somebody's basement, if we were meeting at all. And we certainly wouldn't have a building on a major intersection, with a sign including the words God, Bible, and Church.

Nor would we be free to speak of our religion in the public square. Or broadcast it online.

Apart from the protection of our basic rights, we'd live in a "fear society" instead of a "free society." Phrases that come from author and former Soviet dissident, Natan Sharansky. Who said that the extent of our freedoms and rights can be measured by "the town square test."

*Can a person walk into the middle of the town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm? If he can, then that person is living in a free society, not a fear society.* (Natan Sharansky, *The Case for Democracy*, 40-41)

I thank God that we're able to do that for the most part.

➤ But it's pretty obvious that our basic rights are at risk these days, aren't they? The *workplace* is increasingly restrictive on our speech and religious freedom. Social media has begun censoring posts, videos, and books. Libraries and schools are doing the same, especially in the last month. And it's debatable whether we could express our biblical views right now in some town squares, without fear of physical harm.

And then there's the recent Supreme Court ruling that undermines a woman's safety and threatens *all* our civil rights. Just by saying that the word "sex" in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, doesn't just mean male and female, but sexual preference and gender identity.

That will undermine a woman's safety, tilt the playing field against her, and put all our rights at risk. Because sexual preference and gender identity now trump religious freedom. At least in the marketplace. How long before the same is true in churches? Our rights are at risk.

➤ But that's nothing compared to the *absence* of rights for the unborn these days. On the most important basic right, the right to life, their right to live, our country is failing miserably.

Abortion is legal and rampant. Almost a million every year. Based solely on the decision of a woman, whose "right to choose" is protected, but her baby's isn't. Her baby's right to choose is infringed. And so is her baby's right to life.

➤ So once again, we're not perfect on this. Just like slavery in the 1800's and civil rights in the 1900's, we're failing miserably in some respects. But thank God the intent is there. Thank God the law, and the principles, and the rights are enumerated. Now we just need to protect them for everyone. And make sure that one doesn't infringe on the other.



Give thanks, and pray without ceasing.

And last . . .

**Thank God for a country that upholds the law instead of ignoring it.**

And I don't just mean the government, I mean the people. Us.

We live in a country, that for the most part, is law-abiding instead of law-breaking. For the most part. Recent events have seen a degradation of that, no doubt, but thank God most people respect the law. And respect those with the responsibility to uphold it. Those in authority. Thank God for that.

Because if recent events have shown us anything, it only takes a few to ruin our country for everyone. Only a few to flaunt the law – by looting, stealing, and destroying – and only a few leaders to allow it. That's all it takes.

Lawlessness and license, allowing people to do whatever they want, not only wrecks the lives and livelihoods of those who bear the brunt, but incentivizes others to do the same. Undermining the rule of law everywhere, and ruining our country for everyone.

➤ What's more, apart from the rule of law and those who uphold it, we have no hope of living a quiet, peaceful life. Which is one of the *goals* for our lives. Laid out by the Apostle Paul in **1 Tim 2:1-2**.

*[1] First of all, then [in light of the Gospel, and the unrest in his day], I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

Thank God for a country that upholds the law instead of ignoring it, but don't take it for granted. It requires leadership. Good leaders. Wise leaders. Courageous leaders.

Pray for that. *Pray* for those in authority these days. From our President to our mayors. Pray that God would give them wisdom and courage. Strength and stamina. Perseverance and support.

And make sure you follow. *Modeling* what it means to uphold the law, and exhorting others to do the same. **1 Pet 2:13-14** says:

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, [14] or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*

➤ If we're going to continue as a country where peace and safety are the norm, we must not only *pray* for those in authority, but *submit* to them; *be subject* to them. And exhort others to do the same. To uphold the law, instead of ignoring it.

Then and only then, will we have a country to be thankful for.

Prayer – Lord, thank you for a country founded on biblical principles instead of secular ones. A country that's democratic instead of dictatorial. That protects basic rights instead of restricting them; and upholds the law instead of ignoring it. We're blessed, God. We know it and feel it. So help us preserve it. For your glory and our joy.