

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Guest Speaker
TITLE: YOUNited States of America
DATE: July 3, 2016
PASTOR: Andy Stanley

This week, we're hearing a special Independence Day message from Andy Stanley, pastor of North Point Community Church in Georgia (originally delivered one year ago).

The United States of America is a nation of laws. But laws don't inspire greatness, excellence, or virtue. In fact, when we confuse what is legal with what is moral, everyone looks for a loophole to serve his or her own interests.

- If we were to rewrite the ninth amendment in our modern language, we might write it like this: The right to do what I want when I want with whom I want as long as it doesn't interfere with anyone else's amended ninth amendment rights.
- If you give people rights but they aren't coupled with responsibilities, things go horribly wrong. Individual rights *must be* coupled with individual responsibilities. **Liberty without responsibility undermines liberty.**
- The authors of the Bill of Rights assumed "moral guardrails" provided a level of personal responsibility. They made certain assumptions:
 - A consensus of conscience
 - Divine accountability—we are all accountable to God for how we exercise our individual rights
 - Individual expression governed by concern for other individuals
- "Our constitution was made only for a **moral** and **religious** people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." —John Adams
- When my rights infringe upon your rights, who is to say who is right? When rights collide, the courts decide.
- The law represents the minimum requirement: *how low can I go*. Result: Individual rights regulated by law. This is a recipe for you and me to be as selfish as we can legally be. Rights become nothing more than an exercise of power.
- In the end... the rich rule the poor. Women are a commodity. Children are victims. **If it's legal, it's moral.** Law informs conscience. Everybody looks for a loophole.

So where is the hope? The hope is that 60-70% of our country considers themselves to be some sort of Christian. It's not the laws, because they have been permanently decoupled from a moral code. Instead, it is the behavior of the people that can change our trajectory.

- Our natural tendency is to leverage freedom for our personal benefit. But Paul warns us against that in Galatians 5:13 (NIV): "You, my brothers and sisters were called to be free.

But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** We have the right *not to*, but the opportunity *to*.

- “I’m going to leverage my freedom to love my neighbor as myself. I’m going to look at everyone in my life through the lens of *how would I want to be treated.*” If everyone did that, there would almost be no need for any of our laws. When a nation looks up and asks, “How good can I be?” all the fine print becomes irrelevant.
- Paul continues in Galatians 5:15: “If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

We are a nation of laws, but we can do better. Christians are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to do unto others as God, through Christ, has done unto us. Leveraging our individual rights for the benefit of others will prevent our liberty from devouring itself.

- **Do what’s just**, not what you can justify. “How high can I reach and how can I help?”
- **Do what’s responsible**, not what’s permissible. “That’s my responsibility.”
- **Do what’s moral**, not what’s modeled. “I am done taking my moral cue from the people around me.”
- **Honor God.** “What would be most honoring to God?”

“Posterity! You will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! **I hope you will make good use of it.** If you do not, I shall repent in Heaven, that I ever took half the pains to preserve it.” —John Adams

For Discussion:

1. What are some examples in our culture of how individual rights are no longer anchored to personal responsibility?
2. In what areas are you tempted to exert your individual rights without regard for the personal responsibility that goes along with those rights?
3. During the message, Andy said, “If there is no moral consensus and sense of divine accountability, this grand experiment of personal freedom will fail. Liberty will devour our liberty.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. This week, as you interact with those who are different from you, what is one way you can honor God by doing what is responsible instead of what is permissible?