

*2 Many nations will come and say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 3 He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 4 Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. 5 All the nations will walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.*

Dear friends in Christ,

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." On this Independence Day and before we get to celebrate with the fireworks and the barbeque, let's take time to remember the most important part of the pledge to us as Christians, ONE NATION UNDER GOD, so that we remember who it is that has given us this wonderful country in which to live.

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Although today is the celebration of the Declaration of Independence, it is more than that isn't it? The fact that you and I get to assemble here to hear a message based on the Word of God also makes today a celebration of the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights offers us freedoms that we dare never take for granted. But it is not just the Bill of rights that offers principles of freedom. *(2) Many nations will come and say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Micah is prophesying about a day when people will know what true freedom is, being able to live in a manner that is truly free. That only happens when we live according to God's ways, walk in his paths, and follow his law. When we see the problems of our society, and the political arguments about what is moral and what is not, it is easy to shake our heads, if not our fingers at the society around us. It's easy to feel that the loss of so much American blood is taken for granted.

But brothers and sisters, can you and I undergo the same scrutiny? Perhaps you have never been on the wrong side of the law for more than a speeding ticket. I would guess that is true for most of us. But remember that our emphasis is one nation, UNDER GOD. Can you say the same of God's laws? Break the laws of our land and you will be fined or imprisoned. Break God's laws and you will die a painfully eternal death. Do you really want to suggest that your thoughts and words have always been moral? Have you always been appreciative of Christ's blood shed for you to give you freedom or have you taken it for granted? Is God shaking his head and his finger at you?

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What would a God whose principles of freedom we have ignored and taken for granted do? He will not ignore us. *(3) He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

Today as we celebrate Independence Day, we would be remiss if we did not appreciate the peace we have in our country. The sons and daughters of this country, and specifically, our congregation, are out there preserving peace for you and me. We pray for them all to come home safely.

Have you ever wondered what the average Roman soldier who lived through the battles did when the war was over? What did they do with their spears and arrows and swords? In an agricultural society, they turned those good metal weapons into plows and pruning hooks, so that they could make a living and enjoy the peace that had been won for them.

I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is we have been at war against a holy God. Here is the good news: we have lost! The fight against the Lord is over and Jesus has won the battle. The reason he came to this earth was to bring us peace. That is what the angels sang about: "Peace on earth, good will toward men." So, we who are sinful, would no longer war against God, but rather be at peace with God, because his Son came to win redemption for us. Romans 5:1 says, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

He reaches out to each of us and offers forgiveness for all of our war crimes. He offers us who hated him, pure self-sacrificing love. He offers us his enemies the right become adopted into his own family and full forgiveness for every trespass. He offers all of us peace through Jesus Christ.

With peace, comes prosperity. There is a quote by King Henry IV of France about the prosperity he wanted to bring to his country, "I want there to be no peasant in my realm so poor that he will not have a chicken in his pot every Sunday." God also offers us prosperity. (4-5) *Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations will walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.*

What a wonderful promise this is. God promises that every person will have such riches that he will have his own fig tree or vine and the time to sit under its shade in the middle of the day, when the sun is hot, because he will not have to work during that time. For the average Israelite that was true prosperity.

That may not seem like the measure of prosperity that people in our country would use today. But they do not understand what prosperity is for you and me as beloved children of God either.

They do not understand that for a Christian, prosperity is not about material things. It is following the ways of the Lord more and more. It is the peace of a clean conscience before the Lord day by day, to have our sins forgiven and to freely forgive those who sin against us. It is the freedom that we have that only comes from knowing and believing in Jesus. It is the ability to live no longer for ourselves, but for him who redeemed us. As one nation UNDER GOD, he offers us a prosperity that can never be matched by any politician, any government bailout, any inherited wealth.

About 30 years ago, I was in Chicago on the waterfront on Independence Day. The Chicago symphony was playing all the songs we want to hear on Independence Day. I was a little immune to what it all meant until, with fireworks overhead, 100,000 people and I all sang America the Beautiful. I got a little choked up and still do I everytime I hear those songs. It is the same feeling I get every time I hear VBS children sing, or all of you recite our common faith in one of the creeds, or when we express our oneness at the communion rail. It all reminds me just how blest we really are, that we are one nation, UNDER GOD. Amen.

#### GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. He who is in authority does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:1-4).

#### DUTIES SUBJECTS OWE TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (Rom. 13:1, 5-7). "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work" (Tit. 3:1). "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right" (1 Pet. 2:13, 14).<sup>1</sup>

Some ask, how can government be from God, since so many have come to power by evil use of force? Julian<sup>14</sup> is an example. And Scriptures call Nimrod a hunter, because he had grasped for so much (Gen. 10[:9]).

This is the answer. When in Rom. 13[:1] Paul says that the government is of God, this is not to be understood in the sense that government is an affliction in the way that murder or any other crime is inflicted by God, but in the sense that government is a special ordinance and function of God, just as the sun is a creature of God or marriage is established by God. An evil man who takes a wife with evil intent can abuse the ordinance of marriage. So also a tyrant can abuse the ordinance of God, as Julian or Nero<sup>15</sup> did. The ordinance, by which peace and justice is maintained, remains a divine creation even if the person who abuses the ordinance does wrong.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (355). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>14</sup> Julian, Roman emperor from 361–363 A.D., also known as "the Apostate," defected from the Christian religion and sought to re-introduce hellenistic paganism as the religion in his empire.

<sup>15</sup> Nero, Roman emperor from 54–68 A.D., whose name is associated with the first great persecution of Christians known to history.

<sup>2</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1958). *Vol. 40: Luther's works, vol. 40 : Church and Ministry II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (40:283). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.