

# Under God

July 4, 2010

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## I) 1 Peter 2:9-17; Leviticus 26:3-12

### II) Introduction

#### A) **Class president**

- 1) It was a great honor to be elected class president of Mrs. Yakamoto's second grade class. I'm convinced that my one and only campaign speech made the difference in the election. I had practiced very hard and had it down.
  - (a) *First, I promised that as class president I would always be on time. Punctuality is always a quality that people want in a leader.*
  - (b) *Second, I promised that I would help people with their problems. I have no idea what I might have done if someone actually came to me with a problem but it sure sounded good in the speech.*
- 2) My distinguished opponent's speech didn't go very well. First, he obviously had not practiced. He got up and mumbled something like,
  - (a) *"I'm Randy Callihan and I wanna be class president because.... Because... I'm Randy Callihan and I wanna be class president because..."*
- 3) I thought his rhetorical use of repetition was clever but the speech still lacked content until his eyes lit up and he got a mischievous grin on his face.
  - (a) *I'm Randy and I wanna be class president because I promise that the boys will always get first in line for recess and lunch.*
- 4) A huge soprano roar went up from the male constituency of the class. I was feeling kind of badly at first until I realized that there were 20 girls in the class and only 13 boys. Randy had made the fatal political mistake of alienating the largest voting block of the class. I won by a landslide.

#### B) **Pledge of allegiance (set up flag)**

- 1) The most important duty of the class president was to lead the class in the Pledge of Allegiance.
  - (a) *Every morning I walked to the front of the class and asked them to stand. I stood at attention with my right hand over my heart and began the patriotic paragraph which for some of the class was still not fully memorized and for most of us, we really had no idea what some of the words meant like "allegiance" and "indivisible", let alone the ideals to which we were pledging.*
  - (b) *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.*
- 2) In humble dignity I returned to my seat. I looked presidential.

#### C) **Air raid**

- 1) Being class president in 1963 also had its downsides. Every month or so the whole school did air raid drills. When the alarm sounded, we all jumped out of our chairs and pushed our desks against the wall. We had been taught that in the case of a nuclear bomb being dropped in our city that we were to climb under our desks, cover our heads and close our eyes.
- 2) Unfortunately, it was the job of the class president to be the last one standing in order to turn the lights out in the classroom. To this day I do not understand why it was so important to turn out the lights in preparation for a thermonuclear explosion.
- 3) These were confusing and treacherous days in America. I could not understand why the communists would want to bomb Gladstone Street School in Azusa, California except for the fact that it was the hotbed of the next generation of leaders in the free world.
- 4) My aspirations for a life in politics came to an end that year on November 22, when President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Being a president no longer had the same appeal.

### III) Under God

#### A) *9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court*

- 1) On June 23, 2004, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, voted 2 to 1 that the phrase, “under God” in the pledge of allegiance to be unconstitutional because it is an, “endorsement of religion.”
- 2) The lawsuit was brought by Michael Newdow, an atheist who was in a bitter custody battle over his daughter. The story behind the story was that Newdow’s wife was a born again Christian and the lawsuit was intended to not only purge America’s pledge of God but also to humiliate and persecute his wife.
- 3) America’s reaction to the court’s decision was, how should I put it –swift and angry. Members of the House and Senate on both sides of the aisle, the White House and important people and institutions from around the country blasted the court’s verdict with words like “ridiculous, crazy and stupid.”
- 4) Although the phrase “under God” was added to the pledge in 1954, it absolutely conveys the genius and faith of our forbearers who birthed a nation conceived in liberty, “under God.”
- 5) Today we celebrate America’s independence. Amidst all of the food, fun and fireworks we must also be sober about the continued sacrifices that are being made for freedom.

#### B) *Patriotism*

- 1) In our text today, the apostle Peter takes a large theological canvas, a palette of colors and a handful of brushes in order to paint a portrait of what a Christian patriot should look like. The portrait is going to be bold and dramatic. But I want to warn you, it will be a disturbing image that is hard to reconcile with the American dream. When Peter is done, you may not like what you see.

- 2) Peter is not telling us whether to vote republican or democrat. He's not even lifting up democracy as God's choice of a governing system.
- 3) Peter proclaims that every Christian, from every nation, in every generation is, "under God."
- 4) Whether or not we say the words, "under God" in our nation's pledge – have "In God we trust" printed on our money – or inaugurate our president with the words, "so help me God", every Christian is absolutely, unequivocally, without question to submit to God and the human authorities he places over us.

*(a) I warned you that you might not like what Peter is going to paint.*

#### **IV) Submit**

##### **A) Portrait**

- 1) The background for the portrait Peter paints is a description of who we are as Christians. Followers of Jesus are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who belong to God.
- 2) Peter then establishes a critical aspect of the portrait, the light source. It is in the contrast between darkness and light that the picture comes alive. He says,
  - (a) *"That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*
- 3) Peter says that we are aliens. Don't be confused. Not those kind of aliens. Rather, we are resident aliens. Our citizenship belongs to another kingdom, the Kingdom of God. We only have green cards here on earth.
- 4) The figure in the portrait we see is in a troubling posture. This patriot does not stand erect and strong, instead the person is kneeling and is obviously wounded. What's even more troubling is that this person is suffering injustice.
- 5) Peter says in the strongest language and images he can find that as citizens of heaven, as people of God we are to submit ourselves to the authorities under which we are placed on earth.
  - (a) *Verse 13, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men; whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*
- 6) We are called to submit to the earthly authorities over us even when they are godless, dictator monsters like Saddam Hussein or Adolph Hitler.
  - (a) *This doesn't seem right does it? What kind of teaching is this that we would submit to something that is absolutely corrupted and completely against God?*
- 7) Peter doesn't answer our questions right away, instead he continues to paint.

### **B) Freedom**

- 1) The clothes worn by the figure in the painting are sparkling white. You almost squint at the purity of the garment because it hides nothing evil. Peter says that as Christians we are to live as free people.
  - (a) *We are free to do good in the face of the worst of all circumstances.*
  - (b) *We are free to stand up for others who suffer injustice, and free to release what might be our own rights in order that those who persecute us might know Christ.*
- 2) The portrait is almost finished except for the face. With a few delicate strokes of the brush, Peter brings into focus three distinct features of the Christian patriot. In verse 17, he highlights them under the heading of "Show proper respect to everyone."

### **C) Love, Fear and Honor.**

- 1) **First, we are to love the community of believers.** Love for other Christians is not necessarily easy, you know. There are times we don't even like each other let alone love each other. Yet, the command is to love. Peter is not describing an emotion that makes you all warm inside with goose bumps on the outside. This is a submissive love that puts other people's preferences and agendas above our own.
- 2) **Second, we are to fear God.** Over and over the Bible tells us to fear the Lord.
  - (a) *Be careful and don't dilute scripture here. Fear is the right word. We are to be afraid. Jesus said in Matthew 10, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*
- 3) **Third, Peter then calls us to honor the king.** Do you understand how difficult this statement had to have been for him to make?
  - (a) *Peter wrote this when Nero was the emperor of Rome. Nero was probably the most bloodthirsty, evil tyrants that the world has ever known. He even banished and killed his own mother to protect his power. Under his reign the persecution of Christians was ignited and spread throughout the world.*
  - (b) *One of the most effective tactics Nero used to persecute Christians was to blame them for everything that went wrong. Nero blamed the Christians for starting the fire that burned Rome. Historians are pretty certain that he started the fire himself.*
- 4) Christians were accused of cannibalism because they ate a sacred meal of flesh and blood. Christians call this the Lord's Supper.

(a) *Rev. David Roper put it this way, "The early Christians were accused of murder, human sacrifice, incest--every gross and vile immoral act. Now put yourself in their shoes. Suppose your neighbors thought you attended church in order to participate in a murderous, incestuous, drunken orgy. After church you would return home, knowing that they were staring at you out of their windows as you walked up the driveway, their children, out in the front yards, watching with wide-eyed wonderment! That is what the Romans were saying about Christians. You can imagine the tendency to react defensively and get resentful and rebellious and ugly in spirit."*

5) In spite of the corruption of the government or kingdom under which we are born, Christians are still to honor the king.

(a) *This is troubling, I know. What's worse is that Peter even addresses those who are slaves to submit to their masters with respect.*

#### **D) The face Portrait is painted**

1) The answer to all the hard questions we ask is reflected in the face of the one Peter paints in the portrait.

(a) *Verse 21, To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to God who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

#### **E) The face in the portrait is Jesus.**

1) By looking into the face of Jesus we know what it means to **love the community of believers.**

(a) *Here we see Jesus kneeling in the upper room, washing the feet of his disciples.*

2) By looking into the face of Jesus we know what it means to **fear God.**

(a) *It is in the Garden of Gethsemane we see Jesus lying prostrate in prayer, literally sweating blood in anguish over what he knew was to come. Yet, he submitted himself fully to his Father saying, "not my will but yours be done."*

3) By looking into the face of Jesus we know what it means to **honor the king**, even a bad king.

(a) *Jesus chose to submit to the earthly authority of the Romans even though it was thoroughly corrupt and morally unjust. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus,*

(b) *"Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would not have power over me if it were not given to you from above."*

#### **V) Conclusion**

##### **A) Application**

- 1) I believe that you will take this portrait of a Christian patriot of Peter and make your own applications.
  - (a) *But don't you dare try to listen to Peter's word with the American flag stuffed in your ears and covering your eyes. If you do you will miss out on the true meaning of the true freedom that God offers.*
  - (b) *Don't you dare despise this flag either. Even with all of America's flaws and sins we are to be respectful of the constitution and laws that govern us.*
- 2) **You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. So live as free people but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the community of believers, fear God, honor the King.**

#### **B) Star Spangled Banner**

- 1) As the former president of Mrs. Yakamoto's 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class it is my sacred duty to close by reading you the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of the Star Spangled Banner
  - (a) *O, thus be it ever when freemen shall stand,  
Between their lov'd homes and the war's desolation;  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land  
Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserv'd us as a nation!  
Then conquer we must, when our cause is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust"  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

#### **VI) Prayer**

- 1) We submit ourselves to you, O God. Even when we are faced with injustice and persecution, we put ourselves into your hands. We hold loosely our own rights as Americans and as human beings in order that we might stand up for the rights of others who cannot stand on their own. We submit to earthly authorities so that others will see your portrait in us.
- 2) Lord, this is so hard to understand. It goes against our natural reason and reactions, so we need your guidance and strength.
- 3) In these treacherous times around the world we thank you for the blessing you have given to America. Forgive us when we squander those blessings and help us as Peter says, to live as free people under God.
- 4) In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

#### **VII) The Lord's Supper**

#### **VIII) Benediction**

- 1) 1 Peter 2:12 Live such good lives among the unbelievers that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- 2) Go in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.