

# Declaring and Securing Liberty: The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution

By Jim Jess

## Biblical Foundations of Freedom

A great principle of truth in the Scriptures is the concept of free will. When God made the soul life of mankind, he gave man freedom of will – to obey Him or to disobey Him. Given the opportunity, anyone can choose to follow God and His son Jesus Christ.

We can become born again when we exercise our power to choose Jesus Christ as our personal lord and savior.

Romans 10:9:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

To be saved is to be set free spiritually.

It was by free-will choice that we each decided to believe and become a child of God. It is by our free will that we decide to walk in fellowship with God, our heavenly Father. We have great freedom in Christ, but with this freedom comes responsibility – the responsibility to make good decisions and live the lifestyle of God's Word.

Galatians 5:13:

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

With liberty comes the responsibility to make the right choices. This is also true of our rights and responsibilities as American citizens.

Just as we must learn the Scriptures to understand how to walk in fellowship and manifest our heavenly citizenship, it is vital that we understand our rights and responsibilities as citizens of the United States.

The Apostle Paul, who successfully spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his day, was knowledgeable of his rights as a Roman citizen.

- When he was arrested in Jerusalem, Paul was able to avoid being beaten by asserting his rights as a Roman citizen. (Acts 22:25-29)
- When he was threatened with death by Judean assassins, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. (Acts 23:12-15; 25:1-3, 9-12)

As citizens of the United States of America, we have many more rights recognized in our Constitution than those enjoyed by Paul and other Roman citizens. Today, we live in a nation that was founded on biblical principles, which are at the core of our nation's founding documents. But we cannot exercise

rights that we know little or nothing about. We cannot carry out the responsibilities of self-government if we do not understand our responsibilities as citizens. Before we can act on our rights and responsibilities, we must understand our nation's founding documents. These documents provide the ground rules by which we can function as informed citizens. As citizens, we need to understand the relationship between the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

## **The Declaration of Independence Declared Individual Liberty**

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed the principles on which the United States was founded.

The Declaration was drafted by the Continental Congress in 1776 in order to declare to the world the reasons the 13 colonies that became the United States of America were separating from Great Britain. The delegates of the colonies, assembled in the Congress, declared that "all political connection between them [the colonies] and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved."

The Declaration, in its second paragraph, stated the foundational principles of the new nation:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

These principles were fundamental for the Founding Fathers. They were principles that had been tested over time, principles that were unchanging. A number of these principles can be found in the Bible, the Word of God. When someone says that our nation was founded on biblical principles, the following principles are among those that are being referenced. The commitment to these principles over many years has brought success and prosperity to our nation.

## **Biblical Principles in the Declaration of Independence**

### **1. "All men are created equal"**

The Bible teaches that God does not favor one man or woman over another. He honors our believing as we act on His Word.

In the Book of Acts, Peter had gone to visit a household of Gentiles, which was forbidden by Hebrew culture in the first century. But Peter listened to God's instructions and obeyed, following God's revelation. He spoke this great truth before all of the Gentiles gathered in the household of the centurion Cornelius and also in the presence of the Judean brethren he took with him on his journey. Peter declared this before the assembly:

Acts 10:34-35:

Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

But in every nation he that feareth [respects] him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Another Scripture to consider that relates to this topic is in Acts 17. This shows that race and ethnic backgrounds have nothing to do with one's relationship with God or His willingness to accept anyone who chooses to follow Him. The Apostle Paul spoke this truth in his conversation with the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens.

Acts 17:26:

And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.

Every human being's blood runs red. There is no difference between individuals because of race or ethnic background. What some men may consider important distinctions are not important to God. Many in the political realm seek to use race or ethnic backgrounds to sow division among people or to even incite violence. This is just one more example of the folly of men and women who have rejected God.

Each individual counts as one. No man is above another and no man has a right to rule over another. We are all equal before God.

All men and women may not have equal situations in life or equality of conditions, but we all have the same opportunity to believe and achieve. All of us have challenges in life, but we can learn to rise above these challenges. In our nation today, we still have plenty of freedom to work hard and pursue our dreams.

Those who claim "victimhood" due to race, sexual orientation, ethnic background and similar characteristics often seek to "cash in" by using their victim status to qualify for government benefits. But this has nothing to do with equality. "All men are created equal" does not mean everyone should be guaranteed an equal outcome by the government or a guaranteed annual income. Some call the push for equal outcomes "equity," and they attempt to set up a stream of government benefits and societal conditions to guarantee equal outcomes. But these schemes are not likely to succeed, nor is it the purpose of a government that operates according to our Constitution. Such programs require taking from one group and giving to another. It is nothing more than "legal plunder" and is inconsistent with individual liberty and the rights of each individual to enjoy the fruit of their labors.

James Madison wrote in *Federalist No. 10*, that if government was to reduce everyone to an equal station in life, it would have to destroy liberty to do so. The effect of the victimhood crusade is similar. If everyone becomes a victim, who will pay the victim benefits?

Establishing victim categories for anyone who has been wronged only lays the groundwork for lazy and opportunistic individuals to profit from the sympathy of others. It encourages people to focus on how they have been wronged instead of making something of themselves. It encourages individuals to be wards of the state and live off the taxpayers. And frankly, there is no constitutional authority to spend federal funds in this manner. Small-minded politicians – who reject our Constitution and seek to please the victimhood lobby – support these programs regularly in Congress, state legislatures and other public bodies. These public officials should be removed from office.

“All men created equal” means each individual has an equal opportunity to believe and achieve, not an entitlement to receive a free ticket to a guaranteed outcome.

## **2. “Endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”**

God gave man free will when he made man's mind. By using our minds, we each exercise the power to choose, to make choices. Our Creator gave us rights that are inalienable (“unalienable” in the text of the Declaration), meaning incapable of being altered, transferred or taken away. No man has the right to revoke these rights.

The publishing of the Declaration of Independence marks the first time a civil document recognized God as the giver of rights. In the past, kings or other rulers had granted rights to their subjects. But government cannot give anyone rights. Government can only give that which it has first taken from someone else. God is the giver of rights, not government.

The Declaration lists the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The right to life is a most basic one, the right to live our life without our existence being threatened. Liberty is the power to choose, the power to make choices and decide for ourselves the direction we wish to take in this life. And the pursuit of happiness is the power to pursue our dreams – whatever they may be – consistent with upholding the first two rights that are mentioned.

Those who clamor for so-called “rights” today are misusing the term. Advocates for “gay rights,” “welfare rights,” “victim rights” and “a right to health care” are seeking special privileges or entitlements for specific groups. These victim or entitlement groups are composed of some people who have been deceived as well as some who are trying to deceive others. Homosexuals do not need special privileges. They have all the rights they need, which are the same inalienable rights that anyone else has. “Welfare rights” tells a story in itself. Those seeking to live off the government dole seek to increase their influence with politicians who can increase their benefits, instead of working if they are able to do so. “Victim rights” is based on someone's bad experiences in life, which has nothing to do with rights. Health care is a service, not a right. Health care services involve someone's desire to be treated for health concerns. That is not the same thing as an inalienable right.

These special interest groups have reframed the discussion of rights to include characteristics that are clearly not rights at all. Twisting a definition of a word to fit your political agenda does not change the meaning of a word. But if you can get enough people to accept your new definition, you're on your way to establishing new government policies.

Then, you just need to find enough ignorant or opportunistic politicians who want the support of your special interest group and convince them to enact a new law. Once the law is on the books, you have a new way to defraud the taxpayers and enrich the members of your special interest group. If you're really smart, you make this new benefit category an “entitlement,” which becomes a permanent part of the budget of our national government and does not have to be debated or justified every year. It's automatic, based on certain economic indicators.

Our God-given inalienable rights are distinct from what some are trying to redefine as “rights.” Don’t be fooled by the politics of deception.

### **3. “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men.”**

The purpose of government is to secure, or protect, our God-given rights. The securing of our rights is the basic purpose of government. Government is to protect our power to choose, that God-given free-will choice. While some may say that the purpose of government is to provide things that are needed by the citizens – health care services, welfare payments, special benefits for the poor – this was not the view of the Founders – at least not for the national government.

One of the basic ways government secures our rights is by protecting the rights of property and personal liberty through the functions of public safety agencies. At the local level, police are supposed to uphold the law and protect the public from evildoers. The national government fulfills this duty through national defense – securing our borders, maintaining armed forces to protect our nation and providing the necessary military equipment to accomplish this.

The abandoning of the public safety function by many mayors and local governments in the United States today is an unspeakable crime. In some cities and counties, voters have elected misguided public officials, and these public officials have violated their oaths of office in order to please mobs of subversives. These public officials lack sound judgment. If people in these areas continue to elect such pathetic and misguided officials, they deserve the dysfunctional government they receive. But it is disturbing for the rest of the nation to witness.

These misguided local officials may believe they are upholding the rights of mobs to protest, even when they disturb the public peace, break windows, set fires to businesses and police stations or engage in other destructive activities. Has it occurred to them that the rights of those whose businesses are being destroyed are being egregiously violated? What about their rights? Or what about the property paid for by the taxpayers, such as the police precinct building in Portland, Oregon, that was burned to the ground? What about the horrible waste of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money? Is this securing the rights of the governed? Obviously not. But these public officials will continue in office as long as the voters allow them to stay. The voters can change this if they want to.

### **4. “Deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”**

Government is to rule with our consent. Our leaders should not rule us because they want us to serve them. The Bible documents how the children of Israel gave their consent when Moses presented them with God's laws.

Exodus 24:3, 7:

And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And he [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.

So the people of Israel gave their free-will consent to live according to the laws of God. It was a social compact, an agreement between a group of people and a governing authority. In this case, God was the governing authority, and He worked with Moses to govern on His behalf for the benefit of the people.

Government should be the servant of the governed, not our master, because government is to rule with our consent. Government is to work on our behalf. The people of a nation are not supposed to work to serve their government. Jesus taught his disciples about the true sense of serving others. He showed them that the greatest leader should be the greatest servant.

Matthew 20:20-28:

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him.

And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father.

And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Jesus spoke of how the Gentile princes exercised lordship over their subjects, the people, and that those who were over the princes, exercised power over the princes. It was a hierarchy, with those at the top holding the ultimate power over people's lives. This is what politicians do. Men and women seek to wield power over their fellow men, and, if they have a lust for power, no amount of power will ever be enough for them.

In the founding years of the United States, our nation was blessed with great political leaders who *served* according to biblical standards of service. However, in our government today are men and women who desire political power above all else. Both political parties have produced elected officials with these inclinations, and these people are usually the ones in charge. They ignore the true spirit of our founding documents and follow the course of "rulers" instead of servants. Those who wish to rule over others follow the way of the Gentiles, as Jesus described.

**5. "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government."**

Consistent with serving by the consent of the governed, government servants can be removed if they no longer serve the people. We have the opportunity to do this every time we vote to elect our leaders. This is a further exercise of the free-will choices of the people.

**6. The new government should lay “its foundation on such principles” and organize “its powers in such form, as to them [the people, the governed] shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”**

The greatest standard for governing would be for governmental leaders to serve according to principles from the Scriptures. God understands the nature of man and the most effective ways for men to govern themselves. Not everyone will agree that the standards of Scripture should be the standards of the state, but the actions of selfless service by public officials are easy to identify. If public officials seek to serve themselves instead of the public interest, we, the people should replace them with better people who are committed to true service.

## **The Constitution of the United States Secured Liberty**

In May 1787, delegates from the thirteen states convened in Philadelphia, and during the summer of 1787, they drafted the Constitution of the United States. On September 17, the delegates signed the Constitution and submitted it to the states for approval. It was later ratified, or approved, by all the states.

The Constitution defines the basic purposes and functions of our federal government.

The Constitution secured the God-given rights that had been declared in the Declaration of Independence. It established a practical framework for governing in a national government with three branches that would protect liberty through a system that limited the authority of each branch. In addition, the powers delegated to the federal government were quite limited, with most of the powers of governing retained by governments in the states.

**A key principle to remember when studying our national government is that the Declaration DECLARED liberty and the Constitution SECURED liberty.**

### **The Preamble**

The Preamble to the Constitution begins with the words “We the People,” which reinforces the concept that government is to rule by consent of the governed. Then, the Preamble sets forth six basic purposes of government:

“We the People of the United States, in Order to

- (1) form a more perfect Union,
  - (2) establish Justice,
  - (3) insure domestic Tranquility,
  - (4) provide for the common defence,
  - (5) promote the general Welfare, and
  - (6) secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,
- do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

These six purposes of government are difficult to improve upon.

1. The people of the United States needed “a more perfect union” due to unrest in parts of the new nation, which could have led to civil war and the breakup of the union of states. The Constitution accomplished this purpose and still does so today as we apply its principles.
2. Establishing justice is a basic function that every government must carry out in order to secure the rights of the individual and to protect the people from dishonest and criminal elements that threaten safety, order and property in any society.
3. Every government has the responsibility to insure “domestic tranquility,” or civil peace, in its society. After the Revolutionary War, some states experienced riots and popular uprisings that threatened the lives and property of citizens. A government strong enough to insure the civil peace is a requirement for liberty to be secured.
4. Providing for the “common defense” is a key purpose of government. This includes protecting the nation from foreign invasion, whether by armies, criminals or terrorists. In some cases, it is necessary to defend the interests of our nation abroad, but we should not seek conflict with other nations. Throughout the Old Testament, there are numerous examples of biblical Israel defending itself and maintaining strong physical defenses in order to protect its people and ensure the stability of the nation.
5. Promoting “the general welfare” refers to the general well-being of the nation. This is not referring to social welfare programs or government handouts, which are not authorized by our Constitution. The federal government is to pursue policies that encourage a favorable environment in which citizens can live in freedom, be secure in their families and prosper in their businesses and other pursuits, but the government should never try to guarantee results for anyone.
6. Finally, it is the serious responsibility of government to “secure the blessings of liberty” for each citizen. The government has a moral obligation to protect the liberty of its citizens, to ensure that they are free to exercise their God-given rights. Furthermore, government should be so focused on securing these blessings of liberty – the powers of each citizen to choose – that these blessings of liberty extend to future generations.

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