

November 15, 2020

Viewpoint from the Valley Grove Church Of Christ

The Christian And American Freedoms

By Heath Rogers

Many Christians I know love being Americans and cherish the freedoms granted to them by this great nation. It is not wrong for a Christian to enjoy the rights and privileges of national citizenship. Paul certainly made use of his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:24-29; 25:9-12). However, he urged fellow-Christians to understand that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20) and to be willing to surrender their rights for the furtherance of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

When commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, “Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29). To this, many Christians give a hearty “Amen.” It is often asserted that, if our government ever passed laws that contradict the word of God, we must obey God rather than men. However, there is another aspect of this principle that must be considered. Are Christians allowed to enjoy *all* the freedoms *already* granted by our government?

The first ten amendments to the US Constitution are called the Bill of Rights. These were drafted by James Madison in response to calls from several states for further constitutional protection of individual liberties from governmental powers. Several of the rights and freedoms that Americans hold near and dear are set forth in the Bill of Rights.

The first amendment grants the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, and the right to protest the government. It reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; of the right of the people to peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” These freedoms are foundational to what it means to be an American. However, Christians do not have the right by God to fully exercise these privileges.

Freedom of Religion. Congress cannot establish a state religion, nor tell citizens how they are to worship. As a result, the religious landscape of our

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great nation is dotted with multiple denominations of “Christianity,” as well as a growing number of world religions. In fact, many today insist that freedom of religion means freedom *from* religion.

Contrary to this right, God has established His official religion. His Son has built His church (Matt. 16:18), not churches. There is only one church that is right with God. God has also specified how He is to be worshiped. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

I am thankful that we have the freedom of religion, but this does not mean we can worship whoever or however we want. This means we can worship the true and living God in the manner He sets forth in His word without fear of opposition or persecution from the government. I am free to be a part of the Lord’s church, to spread His gospel, and worship Him in spirit and truth.

Freedom of Speech. Americans love expressing their views and voicing their opinions, regardless of how foolish, leud, or blasphemous these opinions may be. Regardless of the freedom of speech granted by the Constitution, Christians are restricted in their speech. “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.... Let no

corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:25, 29).

While many places in our society proudly allow all voices to be heard, some individuals should not be allowed to speak around God’s people. Timothy was charged not to allow others to teach false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3), and Titus was to appoint elders who would stop the mouths of those who “teach things which they ought not” (Titus 1:11). The assemblies of the local church are not comparable to townhall meetings where everyone’s voice gets to be heard.

Freedom to Petition for a Redress of Grievances. The colonists lived under a monarchy. They had to accept whatever King George did and said. This tyranny led them to seek and obtain their independence. When they established their own government, our founding fathers made sure the citizens had the right to protest their leaders.

Christians live under a monarchy. We have a King — Jesus. It so happens that our King governs us in meekness and love (Matt. 11:28-30), so there should never be a time when we would want to protest His words or actions. However, if we think we are above criticizing and protesting our divine King, we need only call to mind the times Israel complained and protested against God in the Old Testament. Yes, we are capable of speaking out against the Lord.

Our King has ordained elders to shepherd and oversee local congregations. Members are to “obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). It is true that elders can step outside of their authority and God’s will. We must obey God rather than men, even when those men are elders in the local church. However, I have seen and heard members exercise their American right to protest and air their grievances against elders when these elders were not stepping out of line. Such brethren were sinning against their King in doing so, not to mention what they were doing to elders they were commanded to obey, submit unto, and esteem highly in love (1 Thess. 5:13).

Conclusion: I could have been born at any other time, or in any other place in the world. I am thankful to God to be an American today. I cherish my rights and freedoms, and try to exercise them in a way that contributes to the furtherance of the gospel and the betterment of my fellowman.

However, I am a Christian FIRST. My citizenship, allegiance, and loyalty are to the Kingdom of God FIRST. Obeying God rather than man is not something I may be called upon to do *someday*, it is something I must do *now*. The U.S. Constitution grants me some freedoms that I simply do not have the right by God to enjoy.

Hard To Explain

By David McClister

“Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing” (Heb. 5:11).

Some things in the Bible are hard to explain (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16), especially for Christians who have not grown in their knowledge of God’s word as they should. Yet the difficult things of God’s word are not optional reading. They are given to us for the purpose of increasing our faith, but they require a certain amount of spiritual maturity and previous understanding of the simpler things in God’s word in order to understand them. God wants us to take in all of his word, the simple and the difficult. All of it is helpful to our faith. Preachers and teachers of God’s word today must take a cue from the author of Hebrews not only to delve into the deeper things of the word for themselves but also to bring their hearers into the profound depths of the word with them. A teacher or preacher who only feeds his hearers with the fundamentals does them a great disservice, for by doing so he keeps them at a level of spiritual weakness that proves dangerous when they must rely upon their faith in times of trouble. It is by increasing our knowledge of the word that we gain strength to fight off the temptations of unfaithfulness.

— *Commentary on Hebrews, pages 200-201*

I AM Is Near

By Jason Hardin

“We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds” (Psa. 75:1).

“I AM WHO I AM” was the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3. Thousands of years later, we continue to give thanks, for I AM is near.

“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (Psa. 145:18).

“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psa. 34:18).

“Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land” (Psa. 85:9).

When something is “near,” it’s close in distance, not far away. When someone is “near,” they can be involved. When help is “near,” it’s available. A Savior who is “near” can be depended upon.

“Nearer, my God, to Thee” can be our confident prayer today. Not because we are worthy or deserving or special, but because the name of our gracious God is near.

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). What an incredible invitation, extended to each one of us today.

November Birthdays:

The 9th Jesse Green; The 20th Joann Haynes; The 17th Sandy Merritt.

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Sunday

Bible Study . . . 9:30 A.M.

Worship 10:30 A.M.

Worship 5:00 P.M.

Wednesday

Bible Study . . . 7:00 P.M.

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