

**AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL:  
FAITH OF THE FOUNDERS  
JULY 1, 2012**

It's almost time for cookouts and fireworks.

But let's remember what the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is all about,  
the signing of the Declaration of Independence,  
the public document that made the case for the Revolutionary War.

And as Christians, we ought to remember the influence of the Christian faith on the founders of this nation.  
We hear some lively debates over whether this is a Christian nation.

If I look around now, I'd have to say NO.

But our nation's founders were undoubtedly men and women of faith.

It is true that not all were orthodox Christians.

But even the most unorthodox were men of faith and deeply effected by Jesus and the Bible.

Almost all of the founders were raised in the church,  
some had considered a vocation in ordained ministry,  
and at least one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence was a pastor.

This morning I want you to hear the faith of some of our nation's founders in their own words.

The document giving the rationale for the Revolutionary War is celebrated on July 4.

The Declaration of Independence, written largely by **Thomas Jefferson**, makes repeated references to God.

Jefferson was not an orthodox Christian, but a deist,  
but he believed in God and was deeply influenced by  
the ethical and moral teaching and example of Jesus.

So he wrote in the Declaration,

“When in the Course of human events,  
it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve  
the political bands which have connected them with another,  
and to assume among the powers of the earth,  
the separate and equal station to which  
the Laws of Nature and of *Nature's God* entitle them,  
a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that  
they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

The Declaration goes on in the next paragraph:

“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.”

The key underlying concept of the American Revolution, stated in these opening words, is that human beings have certain God-given rights.

Not king given, not parliament given, not president- or congress-given,  
but God-given rights.

They realized if our rights are given by a human authority,  
then human authority can also take away those rights.

The founders believed in a power and authority higher than the British crown,  
higher than parliament, higher than a president and congress.

They believed in God.  
 And if God gives us certain rights,  
     no human authority should ever dare to infringe upon those rights.  
 The proper role of human government is to secure and maintain those rights.  
 And if a human government does not do so,  
     it is the right of the people to change or abolish that government.  
 The founders followed the lead of the apostle Peter,  
 who faced hostile authorities and said,  
     “We must obey God rather than men.”

(Ac.5:29)

The day he signed the Declaration,

**Samuel Adams** did more than brew beer.

He noted this key concept of the revolution when wrote,

“We have this day restored the Sovereign, (that is, God)  
     to Whom alone men ought to be obedient.”

This was the foundation upon which the Revolutionary War was fought.

The authority of God, higher than king, higher than parliament, higher than any human authority.

And if the human authorities do not  
     recognize, respect, and protect our God-given rights,  
     then it is the right of the people to do whatever is necessary  
     to bring about change.

Because they deeply believed in God and the righteousness of their cause,

the founders closed the Declaration with these words:

“And for the support of this Declaration,  
     with a firm reliance on the *protection of Divine Providence*,  
     we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”

They truly did lay it all on the line, trusting God.

They risked all for what they believed in.

Some of them lost all their wealth.

Some of the signers lost their lives.

Which causes me to wonder:

Do I, do we, believe so deeply in Christ  
     that we would lay it all on the line for him and his cause?  
     Would we even allow ourselves to be inconvenienced for him?  
     Or do we think we’ve done our part by  
         showing up for an hour every couple of Sundays  
         and putting a few bucks in the offering plate?

The Founders’ faith was a driving force in the founding and initial shaping of this nation.

**John Adams** was a signer of the Declaration, and our second president.

After the Revolutionary War he wrote,

“The highest glory of the American Revolution was this:  
     it connected in one indissoluble bond  
     the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.”

And those principles went into shaping the Constitution as well.

Though God is never mentioned in the Constitution,

certain biblical values and convictions shaped this document that  
     defines our government’s structures, responsibilities and limits.

Constructing the Constitution was difficult at best.

There was politicking and wrangling,

and at one point in 1787 it looked like the discussion would grind to a halt.

At that moment **Benjamin Franklin** rose and spoke,

“The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth –  
that God governs in the affairs of men.

And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his (God’s) notice,  
is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?

We have been assured in the sacred writings that  
‘except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that built it.’

I firmly believe this;

and I also believe that without his concurring aid  
we shall succeed in this political building  
no better than the Builders of Babel.

I therefore beg leave to move –

that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven,  
and its blessings on our deliberations  
be held in this Assembly every morning  
before we proceed to business.”

Because of his request, it was resolved and unanimously passed that  
each day the Constitutional Convention would begin in prayer.

And from that very day the work of hammering out the Constitution of the United States  
moved forward to its completion.

One of the key concepts in the Constitution of the United States is the separation of powers.

No one individual, no single branch of government, would hold a concentration of power.

More than one patriot preacher drew on the story of

God’s prophet Samuel warning Israel against the dangers of  
power being concentrated in the hands of a king.

(1Sam.8)

Rather, power and authority would be divided among three branches of federal government,  
the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.

There would be a further separation of powers between federal and state governments,  
with only certain enumerated powers given to the federal government,  
and all others devolving to the states.

And, finally, the powers of both state and federal governments  
flow from the consent of the governed, that is the voting public,  
you and me.

We all learn that much in school.

What we don’t hear in school, and what many people are unaware of, is  
*the reason* for that separation of powers.

First, the founders had experienced the tyranny of concentrated power from Mother England.

And they had had enough of that.

But second, the founders knew that

“all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

(Ro.3:23)

All. Not just the king of England, not just a few bigwigs in Parliament,  
but all.

Including the very best Americans.

So anyone and everyone is capable of misusing power.

Political party and education do not matter.

You are a sinner.

If you’re a Christian you’ve received forgiveness,  
and hopefully you’re growing into the image of Christ.

But in this life you’re going to struggle with temptation and sin.

We are all capable of misusing power.

They knew they could not fix the character problem, but provided a structural solution.

The separation of powers,

so each holder of government power holds the others in check.

The Constitution codified such a new and unique governmental system,

**Benjamin Franklin** wrote,

“I have so much faith in the general government of the world by Providence

that I can hardly conceive a transaction of such momentous importance

[as the framing of the Constitution]...

should suffer to pass without being in some degree influenced, guided, and governed

by that beneficent Ruler in whom all inferior spirits

live and move and have their being.”

Franklin believed the genius behind the Constitution and the separation of powers was that of God himself.

The founders believed, too, that for our form of government to be maintained,

it required a moral populace.

And they believed the foundation of morality is religious faith.

They feared that, without a basic societal morality,

this form of government would be insufficient to structure society.

More government would be required to control misbehavior,

and eventually would grow larger and more powerful

and become another tyranny like the one they had fought against.

In his farewell address **George Washington** said,

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity,

religion and morality are indispensable supports.

In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism

who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness.

Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life,

if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths

which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?”

**John Adams** said,

“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.

It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”

“It is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles

upon which freedom can securely stand.”

**James Madison**, known as the father of the Constitution, said,

“We have staked the whole future of our new nation not upon the power of government;

far from it.

We have staked the future of all our political constitutions

upon the capacity of each of ourselves

according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments.”

**Alexis De Tocqueville**, was a French historian who toured America in the 1830s

to discover how this nation became so successful so quickly.

He wrote that one of the keys to America’s success was its religious freedom and religious faith.

“Liberty regards religion as its companion in all its battles and its triumphs,

as the cradle of its infancy and the divine source of its claims.

It considers religion as the safeguard of morality,

and morality as the best security of law

and the surest pledge of the duration of its freedom.

Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society,

but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions;

for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of it.”

Chuck Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, died in April.

Shortly before that he wrote of his own concern for our nation  
and the role of faith in maintaining our freedoms:

He asked, “Can freedom survive where virtue doesn’t?”

The Founding Fathers pledge their lives, fortunes and sacred honor  
to defend the self-evident truths

‘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.’

Some of the founders believed this:

No person or nation can be good without God.

This is why they appealed not only to nature, but also to nature’s God.

When a people shows it is no longer capable of corporate virtue and self-government,  
inevitably government steps in to fill the void.

So how to rebuild a culture of virtue and civic duty?

We must challenge the tyranny of relativism not only in theory

but also in our daily lives, families, communities and businesses.

We must show that true happiness comes only from being rightly related to God,  
the source of truth and virtue.

The pursuit of virtue must become a great national priority.”

(Chuck Colson and Timothy George, *Real Happiness*, Christianity Today, Aug. 2011)

And that is where we come in.

The pursuit of virtue, rooted in a relationship with the one true God.

The most patriotic thing we can do this July 4<sup>th</sup> is not just shoot off fireworks and fly the flag,  
but recall what the day is really all about,

pray for our nation,

and do whatever is in our reach to promote Christ.

A father wanted to read a magazine but was being bothered by his little girl.

She wanted to know what the United States looked like.

Finally, he tore a sheet out of his new magazine on which was printed the map of the country.

Tearing it into small pieces, he gave it to her and said,

“Go into the other room and see if you can put this together.

This will show you the shape of our country.”

After a few minutes, she returned and handed him the map, correctly fitted and taped together.

The father was surprised and asked how she had finished so quickly.

“Oh,” she said, “on the other side of the paper is a picture of Jesus.

When I got all of Jesus back where He belonged,

then our country just came together.”

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July,

recall what the day is all about.

pray for our nation,

and do whatever is in your reach to promote Christ.

For further reading on the faith of the founders and its role in the founding of America:

*Miracles of the American Revolution: Divine Intervention and the Birth of the Republic*, Larkin Spivey

*By the Hand of Providence: How Faith Shaped the American Revolution*, Rod Gragg

Scriptures cited: Ac.5:29; 1Sam.8; Ro.3:23