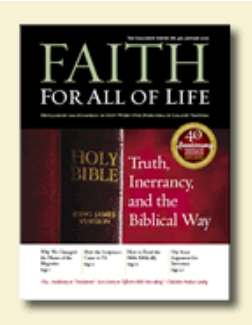
Faith for All of Life
THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION



Freedom Under The Fear of God

John E. Stoos
June/July 2003

> *"He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."* (2 Samuel 23:3b)

There is a simple choice that any group of people must make when organizing the civil government that will rule over them. On the one hand, they can pledge, as the Pilgrims did on the Mayflower to "solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, Covenant and Combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic…" This choice continued years later, when Americans made the same choice by breaking with Mother England. The colonists upheld the principle of "ruling in the fear of God" in the Declaration of Independence with those famous words, "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" [or "property" as in the early drafts].

Or, on the other hand, a group of people can choose to go the way of the French who presented their "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" shortly after our own Declaration of Independence. Not wanting to be under the shackles of religion, and in their pride and rebellion wanting nothing to do with "ruling in the fear of God," the French revolutionaries simply declared that all men are born equal. Americans held to a "firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," but the French stated, "[T]he principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation."[1] The French Declaration talked a lot about "protecting" the rights of individuals, but it was all subject to the laws of the sovereign state. It was not long thereafter that hundreds of thousands of French citizens lost their heads on the guillotines after their "right to life" was deemed expendable by a "committee" of their fellow citizens all done under the laws of the sovereign nation, of course!

Two Choices

Now this may sound simplistic, but these are the only two choices. Either people understand that basic rights come from God and choose to live in a proper fear of God by acknowledging His sovereignty, or people reject God and look to the wisdom and understanding of man to establish what is right and wrong. There are no other choices. The former has been practiced by many countries in Europe and the West, and most consistently, albeit not perfectly, here in the United States. It has resulted in the greatest expansion of freedoms and liberties in the history of mankind. The latter brought forth the French Revolution, the horrors of Marxist Communism in the twentieth century, and, of course, the ultimate humanist experiment of Nazism attempting to create the super race that would rule the world for a thousand years.

Sadly, today few Christians truly understand this choice and certainly few consider the implications. It should truly grieve us to see how much has been forgotten about the impact of the gospel of Christ as it sets people free, not only from their individual sin but in the general affairs of men as well. M. Stanton Evans has done a masterful job of reviewing this part of Christian history in his book, *The Theme is Freedom*. This work should become required reading in all Christian homes and schools. Mr. Evans shows in great detail that only if a people embrace the Biblical principle of "ruling in the fear of God" can any government find "a proper balance between the requirements of liberty and those of order."[2] Only living under God's law enables societies to find a way to give the civil government enough power to keep order, but not so much to endanger their freedom. Mr. Evans puts it this way:

> That biblical teaching was the formative influence in the creation of Europe, and that Europe was the nursery of freedom as we know it, are both

> established facts of record… [T]his correlation of Christianity with the rise of freedom is anything but accidental. In fact, the precepts of our religion provide the conceptual building blocks for the free societies of the West — including the very idea of liberty as we know it, limits on the power of the state, and the institutions that gave these practical expression.[3]

Our modern educators and experts often equate "ruling in the fear of God" with the Taliban or other extremists. In fact, Democrat Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur of Ohio put it this way: "One could say that Osama bin Laden and these non-nation-state fighters with religious purpose are very similar to those kind of atypical revolutionaries that helped to cast off the British crown."[4] You see in the minds of the modern liberal, religion is the problem and to them all religions are equal.

Freedom and the Truth

All religions are not equal, and only Christianity reveals the truth about God's nature, creation, man's fall, and the great salvation available through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The freedoms and liberties that Americans have enjoyed are the product of this faith, and if we fail to understand the foundations upon which they are built, the United States will lose them in very short order. Ms. Kaptur and the other skeptics view Christianity as oppressive. However, they should be asked to explain why the very freedoms and liberties they say they cherish have only existed and flourished where the gospel has been preached and the Bible has been respected and obeyed. The reality is that the concepts of personal freedom and limited government are uniquely Biblical, and any discussion of these concepts by the moderns is simply borrowing from solid Christian foundations.

For more than five years on my radio show this topic was debated, and I usually asked liberals to give me just *one* example of people enjoying freedom and liberty anywhere in the world today, or in history, that was not based on the Biblical teaching of personal liberty and limited government. The best they could do was to try and make our nation secular in its origins with a little revisionist history and then claim our own Constitution as their example. Just ask the Blacks of the 18th and 19th centuries or the unborn children of today how well the Constitution protects life and liberty if the foundations of the Declaration of Independence are not consistently followed by those in power.

The advance of freedom has come at great cost down through the centuries, from the early Christian persecution and Church Councils to our own American War for Independence. We are at risk today of forgetting not only these struggles and sacrifices, but of forfeiting the very foundations themselves as Americans enjoy the safety and affluence that these freedoms and liberties have brought to us.

So, the next time someone objects to having "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance or "In God We Trust" on our federal reserve notes, ask him when it last was that he sat down and carefully read the Declaration of Independence. If he finds the language of the Declaration objectionable or dismisses it as irrelevant for our modern world, then ask him to explain to you what he would replace the principles of that great document with. If you discuss it with him, perhaps you can help him understand the wisdom of choosing to live under the fear of God in freedom and liberty. You might also explain to him that the alternative is certainly living under the fear of man, with the eventual tyranny and death which naturally flow from that choice, as demonstrated by so much of the 20th century.

Notes

1. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen; approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789.

2. M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme is Freedom*. (Regnery Publishing, 1994), 25.

3. *Ibid*., 29.

4. Quoted in the *Toledo Blade*, March 2003.

John E. Stoos is a political consultant living in Sacramento, California, with his wife Linda. They have six children and sixteen grandchildren.

copyright © 2005 The Chalcedon Foundation • www.chalcedon.edu • All Rights Reserved Worldwide.