

## "Is It Okay for a Christian to be Patriotic?"

I want to talk today about *patriotism*. Patriotism simply means love for your country, devotion to your country. *But let's think about the question, "Is It Okay for a Christian to be Patriotic?"*

You may think, "Why are you even asking the question! Why isn't it okay for a Christian to love their country? But doesn't the gospel move us beyond just love for our own people, our own country? Spanish musician, Pablo Casals, once said, "The love of one's country is a splendid thing. But why should love stop at the border?" Hasn't people's love of *their own nation* led to conflicts and wars? Just think of the problems in the world today because nations put their own interests first, often at the expense of weaker or poorer nations. George Bernard Shaw once quipped, "You'll never have a quiet world till you knock the patriotism out of the human race."

The gospel does call us to broaden our vision and concern beyond just the interests and welfare of our own country. All people, all nations, are valued and loved by God. There's a breathtaking vision in the Book of Revelation of people from all nations gathering at the end of time to praise and worship the Lord! "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10). We're to think "kingdom of God", not just "my country". Not just God bless America, but God bless the world.

But there is something to be said of how natural it is, and how good it can be, to love one's own country. Around 597 BC, God's people, the nation of Judah, were defeated by the Babylonians. Many Jews were taken away into captivity in Babylonia. Psalm 137 expresses the deep anguish of the Hebrew people as they missed their homeland: "Alongside Babylon's streams, there we sat down, crying because we remembered Zion...how could we possibly sing the Lord's songs on foreign soil? Jerusalem, if I forget you, let my strong hand wither! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I don't remember you, if I don't make Jerusalem my greatest joy" (Psalm 137:1, 4-6 Common English Bible).

The Apostle Paul had a great love for his people, the nation of Israel. He longed for them to accept Jesus as their Messiah. He says, "I have great sadness and constant pain in my heart. I wished I could be cursed, cut off from Christ if it helped my brothers and sisters, who are my flesh and blood relatives. They are Israelites" (Romans 9:1-2 Common English Bible).

Jesus was a Jew, born into the nation Israel, and His heart was broken when His own nation and people rejected Him. He weeps over the city of Jerusalem, the center of the nation: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you didn't want that" (Luke 13:34).

*It isn't wrong to love your country, to be loyal to your country, as long as that doesn't mean you hate and despise other people and other nations, or that you make an idol of your country and put that in the place of loyalty to God.*

Okay, let's bring this down to the *now*, and what's happening in the U.S. regarding patriotism.

*I think the expression, the feel, of patriotism, has changed in our country.* Taking pride in our country, standing up for the national anthem, celebrating our country with July 4<sup>th</sup> festivities, has in some ways been replaced with angry protests and demonstrations, criticism and scorn for our nation and its history. Instead of patriotism uniting our country, it seems to be further dividing us.

*We have the "cancel culture".* Taking down statues. Renaming schools. Removing images or symbols. Now, some of these icons needed to go. It was good that the state of Mississippi chose to retire the state flag that bore the image of the Confederate flag on it. But some people, for example, want to destroy statues of our Founding Fathers. A statue of George Washington was toppled in Portland, Oregon. One political commentator, Angela Rye, insists that all of the statues of people like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson need to come down. Yes, these Founding Fathers were not perfect. Some held slaves. But disregard whatever good they contributed to the founding of our nation?

*There are those who want to rewrite our country's history to show how bad it is.* Who would deny that in some ways our history is shameful, with our history of slavery, or how we treated American Indians. But to totally despise our history, and insist it's so bad that we can't be fixed as a nation without a massive makeover of our society, or that we haven't made great progress in the area of human rights?

Have you heard of the "1619 Project"? *The New York Times Magazine* recently completed a project in which they wanted to "reframe" American history, and view its founding from the perspective of slavery. It's a season long documentary that's now on streaming services. The ABC network recently showed a documentary on the project. The editor of the project, Nicole Hannah-Jones, back in 1995, wrote an essay in which she said the white race "is the biggest murderer, rapist, pillager and thief of the modern world." She said the white race is comprised of "barbaric devils, bloodsuckers." Now I ask, do you think you'd get a balanced, objective, scholarly history of our country from someone with that viewpoint?

"Critical Race Theory" is another means of maligning and slandering our nation's present and past. Critical Race Theory insists that racism is so ingrained in our history and culture that it permeates everything we do. Have you ever examined critical race theory? I have. And when you get to the core of it, its premise is that no matter what we've done as a nation, it's been motivated by racism. Racism permeates *everything* we do as a nation.

*Criticizing rather than celebrating our country also involves ditching traditional religious symbols and values that were once integral to our national life.* A school in New Jersey canceled all of the holidays on its scholastic calendar. No more Christmas or Thanksgiving or Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. From now on, these will be referred to as "student holidays." But get this: When one of the parents in the back of the room at a school board meeting objected, the school board chairman slammed his fist on the table and said, "This is not a debate."

Cancel culture...rewriting of our nation's history. Rather than being patriotic and being proud of our country, some are insisting that we're so bad that we need a total restructuring of our American society.

*We see this expressed today in the move towards socialism in the U.S.* A 2019 Gallup poll indicated that 51% of people aged 18-29 approved of socialism. A more recent poll showed that 45% of Americans aged 18-24 agreed that socialism is the ideal economic system for the U.S. (So you see what's coming out of our colleges and universities). And yet, many of these young people don't understand what socialism is. I saw a news clip of a reporter on a college campus asking students if they approved of socialism. One young lady said she did. But when the reporter asked her what socialism is, she didn't know what to say.

Socialism in its purest form means the government takes control of companies and industries so that *the state* – not individuals and entrepreneurs – control the economy. In reality, in many socialist states the government controls much more than just the economy.

This move towards socialism can also be seen when people expect the government to provide "free stuff" – free healthcare, free education, free childcare. Some politicians are pushing for these things? There's also talk about a guaranteed income for everyone, "income equality" (which means a redistribution of wealth – taking what is yours and giving it to others).

An increasing number of Americans are saying capitalism – free enterprise – is the enemy, socialism is the remedy. And we need a fundamental overhaul of our American way of life. Recently the Colorado Education Association passed this resolution: "CEA believes that capitalism requires exploitation of children, public schools, land, labor and/or resources. Capitalism is in opposition to fully addressing systemic racism (the school to prison pipeline), climate change, patriarchy, (gender and LGBTQ disparities), education inequality, and income inequality."

But others are warning us of the danger of going down this road. Rebekeh Koffler was born in Russia. She emigrated to the U.S. and became a U.S. citizen, eventually working in our country's Central Intelligence Agency. She tells how she was stunned when her children came home from school, and she discovered that some of the things they were being taught and made to do were the kind of things *she experienced* growing up in that Communist state. Yoenmi Park is a young lady who grew up in North Korea under Communism. She is now a U.S. citizen, and how she eventually was able to escape North Korea and come to this country is a harrowing story. She has now become an activist, warning us Americans that what she experienced going to an American university, and what she sees happening in our culture right now, is what she experienced growing up in North Korea under socialism (Communism). Author and filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza was born in India, and is now an American citizen. His wife Deborah is from Venezuela. Deborah observes that what she sees happening in our country with its push towards socialism is reminiscent of what was happening in Venezuela as it moved towards a socialism that has left that once prospering country in shambles.

Maybe it's time we celebrate our country and all that's good about it. We're not perfect. What nation is? But we are still a land of opportunity. I truly believe if some of the people who say our country is so bad would go live in another country for a while, maybe they might view our country differently. If we're so bad, why are millions of migrants - some risking their lives – streaming through our borders? We're still a land of opportunity for those willing to strive to better themselves. Tim Scott, a black U.S. senator running for President says, "I'm living the dream."

Our American people still have a good heart, and are generous in giving money and resources to help other nations in times of need. Nikki Haley, in her book, *With All Due Respect*, writes extensively of her experience as Ambassador to the United Nations. She says that by the time she became the U.N. Ambassador a resolution had been introduced in the General Assembly every year for 25 years *blaming the U.S. for the poverty and oppression in Cuba*. That's right! A resolution saying that *we are responsible* for the way the Cuban dictatorship treats its people. For the first 24 years the U.S. voted against this absurd resolution. But in the previous year, the former UN Ambassador had *abstained* from voting (for whatever reason).

When the resolution was issued again, she couldn't hide her disgust, and announced that the U.S. would be voting against this resolution, and no longer would sit silently while the UN vented its anti-American stance. They lost the vote: 191 to 2. Only Israel joined us in opposing this resolution blaming us for the Cuban situation. And yet, our country year in and year out contributes at least 20% of the funding for the United Nations system. The American people contribute at least 25% of the budget for UN peacekeeping operations, more than 35% of the funding of the World Food Program, 42% of the burden of paying for the work of the UN Refugee Agency.

We're not perfect. But there's so much good about our country we can celebrate! Dr. Phil, psychologist and TV host Phil McGraw, was recently interviewed on a TV show. He talks about our country, and the direction we are going, how we seem to be losing common sense, and how we are destroying the very things that made this nation great. He said Christians need to stand up and let their voice be heard, that he'll stand up for the national anthem and he's not ashamed to be patriotic. You can watch this interview for yourself. Just go on YouTube and do a search for "Dr. Phil interview with Mike Huckabee". It's worth watching.

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