

One Nation Under God

Flint Fenton

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

As a teacher I hear these words starting at about 7:52 every morning. In fact, if you attended a public school in America any time from 1892 to the present day, you have probably heard or said those words thousands of times. In the 132 years of the existence of The Pledge of Allegiance, it has ascended to America's top court for ruling at least three times (1942, 1998, 2004) for various rulings concerning its constitutionality. The first challenge predates the most controversial phrase, "under God," which was proposed by President Eisenhower in 1954 and approved by Congress.

There is a persistent myth among American-Christians that our citizenship is placed within a "Christian Nation." The truth is that America has never been a "Christian Nation" (although it has been a historically good nation in which to be a Christian). This distinction is an important one for us to observe. When we believe we are a part of a "Christian Nation," it will have a tendency to disturb us when our nation consistently falls short of biblical standards. We must remember this nation has been a good place to be a Christian (and let us pray that it may continue to be; see **1 Timothy 2:2**), but it is not a "Christian Nation."

One problem with the notion of America being a Christian nation is that the church is incompatible with being merged with any government. When Jesus was on trial, he told Pilate, "My Kingdom is **not of this world**. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." With the exception of his servant Peter (see **John 18:10**), the disciples were not fighting those in power and Peter was corrected for his actions. Jesus was not in competition with Caesar.

If the Kingdom of Christ was of this world, Jesus had the resources, power, and authority to fight back instead of going to the cross. It was actually him going to the cross that transfers Christians out of the kingdom of darkness into his kingdom (**Colossians 1:13**). As followers of Christ, we are a kingdom of priests (see **1 Peter 2:9**, **Revelation 1:6-7**), and this kingdom has no particular location on earth (**Daniel 2:34-35**). Although Christians can be found in any nation, no physical nation is synonymous with the Kingdom of Christ, and no physical nation contains all Christians.

God has given considerable influence to the devil concerning the nations of this world. While it is true that all authority ultimately comes from God (see **Romans 13:1-2**), God has apparently granted Satan a fair amount of sway over the kingdoms of this world. Satan was able to offer the Kingdoms of this world to Jesus in exchange for worship (**Matthew 4:8-10**). A condition for him being in bondage is so he can no longer deceive the nations (**Revelation 20:1-3**). He is even referred to as "the god of this world" (ESV **2 Corinthians 4:4**, **John 12:31**). It's important to remember that when we see the nations, we often see Kingdoms under the sway of the devil rather than God, and when we view the Kingdom of God, it is not a nation in the world, nor can it be.

The other issue with considering our nation as a "Christian Nation" is this nation (for the most part) was not established by people who share a faith most of us would recognize. Benjamin Franklin wrote,

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting Changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his Divinity...

Even near the end of Franklin's life, he has a somewhat dismissive attitude to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thomas Jefferson penned the famous introduction to the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson also distilled his own version of the Bible down to the moral teachings of Jesus, eliminating his miracles and claims to divinity.

John Adams, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, said: "But I believe that the Gospel, in the proper sense of the word, is nothing more than a moral philosophy; and I believe that the whole of it is as much the work of the apostles as it is of Christ himself." While many of the Founding Fathers may have identified as "Christian," they often demonstrated little faith that God was at work in the world where they lived and practiced a form of Enlightenment Era deism.

The purpose of this article is not to disparage the United States of America. There is perhaps no sovereign nation that has provided more opportunity for sowing God's word. However, it's important to keep in mind that America is not God's Nation. The church is God's nation. This is an especially timely message as we approach the selection process in our country. No matter who occupies the oval office, who sits on the Throne of David remains the same. Let us give the appropriate honor to those elected (**Romans 13:7**) and offer up prayers on their behalf (**1 Timothy 2:1-3**), even if they did not receive our vote.