

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

DYING TO BE FREE ?

Without dead Christians, there would be no freedom in America. Exaggeration? Nope, understated. Even a shallow review of American history reveals how the Declaration of Independence grew from the blood-stained soil of persecuted believers reading their Bibles - willing to lay down their lives for this liberty.

The Declaration says *"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."* Do you understand the distinctions?

Jesus said, **"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."** The Bible reveals which is which. And it makes it clear that Christians are not to surrender to Caesar. God's Word rules over all, the governors as well as the governed. Our rights come from the Creator. And God ordained government to protect these rights, with powers granted by the people, in accord with God's divine design. Our unique three branches of government find their inspiration in Isaiah 33:22, **"The LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our King, He will save us."**

You can trace the paper trail of freedom from the Declaration back to the Great Awakening, as early colonists retrieved these truths from the Bible. They recovered principles upon which the early colonies modeled their constitutions and founding documents, echoing the Mayflower Compact, which embodied the teachings of the Pilgrims and non-conformist Christians of England, Scotland and Wales - who escaped to America with their lives in order to obey God's Word.

The same truths sustained Christians throughout persecutions of the Reformation, as the Bible was printed in the everyday language of the people, pointing to individual liberty and self-government, not tyranny. These truths from the Bible had already brought increasing freedom to people - through great Christians including St. Patrick and King Alfred the Great, and documents including English common law and the Magna Carta. The history of freedom intertwines with the history of Christian liberty.

American soldiers take an oath to uphold our Constitution. Like our founding fathers, they pledge their lives for the principles of freedom. ***Is it worth dying for?***

The 1st Amendment declares, *"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, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."* The 2nd Amendment assures *"the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."* The 14th Amendment states in part *"nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."*

But many Christians notice how different this Memorial Day seems. This national holiday remembers those who gave their lives in military service to maintain the freedoms of America - freedoms which are based in religious liberty and the principles of Christianity. Yet, the way Christianity is being criminalized and under attack in the public square these days, it makes you wonder if or when we'll be forced to replace all the white crosses in cemeteries that mark fallen soldiers.

Where are the people willing to die for freedom of speech? freedom of religion? Increasingly the voices in our public square demand that Christians reserve their speech and their worship behind closed doors. They say your religious beliefs, based on God's unchanging Word, must acquiesce to the ever-changing fluidity of public opinion, judicial fiat, executive order, legislated and regulated tyranny.

That's the challenge ahead for America. Across the oceans, there are totalitarians threatening the very existence of these freedoms - in the name of "a religion of peace" which beheads those who resist. But it's not just Islamism and it's not just elsewhere. It's here, across state lines and statehouse aisles, where tyranny threatens. The real target is always the authority of God's Word, which reveals true liberty.

Historically, it has been Christians who understood, framed, and defended the principles of liberty. **But - who understands today? WHO will lay down their lives for liberty? Will you ?**