

7-1-2007, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Sunday  
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson, TX

Humble Pride  
Galatians 6:11-16

This Wednesday is the Fourth of July, as we celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence of the American colonies from the British Empire.

I'll be honest with you. There was a time when I thought the colonists overreacted when they decided to go to war to win their independence. I thought that surely the British Empire wasn't that bad. After all, most of the British colonies seemed happy to remain in the Empire.

But then I went to Boston. Boston is where the movement for independence began. Those people in Boston are still angry with the British. I took the tour of the sites where the events which led up to the call for independence took place. I saw the harbor where the Boston Tea Party happened. I saw the homes of those who had been forced to board British soldiers. I saw the place where the Boston Massacre occurred. At each stop I became angrier. The final straw for me was the Old North Church. This is a large church with a simple elegance. I was enjoying the beauty of it, when I read the sign which explained why it was on the tour. The British had confiscated this church and turned it into a riding stable for the British officers.

I finally understood. The British Army and the British officials had been exceedingly arrogant in the way they were treating the colonists. When people are treated disrespectfully, they have two choices: They can simply accept it and lose their own self-respect. Or they can demand to be treated with respect. Our ancestors were proud people. They demanded to be treated with respect. When the British refused to give them that respect, they revolted.

From our inception we have been a people with a great sense of pride. That pride has continued to be the backbone of the American character. We have stood tall for 231 years, through good times and bad times, in times of war and times of peace, in times of prosperity and in times of hardship, in times when we were ridiculed as an insignificant upstart of a nation and in times when we have been resented as the most powerful nation on the earth. It hasn't mattered. Whether others respected us or not, we have respected ourselves.

Americans are a proud people. It is both our strength and our weakness. Once I was teaching a confirmation class, and one of the boys asked me this question: Is pride a good thing or a bad thing? He said, "My father tells me to take pride in myself and what I do. But in the Bible I read that I shouldn't be proud. Is pride good or bad?" I said, "Give me time to think about that, and I'll answer your question next week. Well I spent that week thinking about his question. Here was my answer: There are two kinds of pride. One is good and one is bad. True pride is to want to be as good as you can be. False pride is to think you are as good as you can be. True pride is to believe that you are as good as anyone else. False pride is to believe that you are better than everyone else.

Yes, Americans are proud people. The question is what kind of pride do we have? Do we have true pride or false pride?

We started out with a true pride. But I worry that we are slipping into false pride. I'm afraid that we are becoming self-satisfied. The drive to become a better people and a better nation is not as strong as it once was. I'm afraid that we are thinking that we are better than the people in the rest of the world. I hear people saying things like: Our way of life is better than everyone else's. Our form of government is better than everyone else's. Our way of doing business is better than everyone else's. We are richer than everyone else. Our military power is greater than everyone else's.

It is true that some of that is indisputably true. We are the wealthiest and most militarily powerful nation in the world. The rest of it is debatable. But the point is that if we base our sense of pride on being bigger and better than the rest of the world, we have slipped into false pride.

If that happens, we will lose our ability to treat the other nations of the world with respect. We will start treating them with contempt. And when we do that, we are forcing them into the same position the British forced us into. They will have two choices, either to submit to us and give up their self-respect, or to fight against us. More and more nations are choosing to fight for their self-respect.

We need to turn back to the true pride upon which this nation was founded. We Americans need to learn how to be proud of our way of life without falling into the trap of thinking it is better than everyone else's. And we need to learn again how to be proud of our way of life without falling into the trap of being unable to see that it is not without its faults and failures, that we can and should do better.

America is not the Kingdom of God here on earth. Our way of doing things is not perfect. Some say it is unpatriotic to say anything critical about America. They said the same thing about the prophets in the Old Testament. But when you read prophets carefully, they criticized their nation and its leaders because they loved their nation and wanted it to be the best it could be. They were called by God to be the conscience of their nation. But the leaders were angered by their criticism. Israel was God's people and their kings were appointed and anointed by God. How dare these prophets criticize God's nation and God's anointed leaders? The prophets were accused of being unpatriotic and sacrilegious. When they criticized God's nation and God's leaders, they were criticizing God. Because they refused to listen when the prophets pointed out their faults, they tripped over them and fell. Israel was not a perfect nation and neither is America. Those who refuse to listen to criticism have decided they are as good as they can be. When we stop improving, we start slipping.

In the well-known words of Proverbs, pride—false pride—always goes before the fall. A nation which refuses to see its own faults and failures will eventually trip on them and fall. We must humble ourselves before God and listen to those who are sent by God to warn us of the shortcomings in our way of life.

We should not pride ourselves on being without fault or better than the rest of the world. Our pride should be in being a nation loved and blessed by God.

And we should not fall into the trap of thinking we are the nation best-loved or most-blessed by God.

There is a movie called, "Head of State." It's not a great movie, but it has its moments. It's about an ordinary man who somehow gets nominated to run against a well known and slick politician for President of the United States. This slick politician ends all his speeches with the words, "God bless America, and nobody else."

That shows how silly that movie is. A truly slick politician would never be that obvious. He would never say, "God bless America, and nobody else." He would simply say, "God bless America" and leave it to us to fill in the rest.

Americans with true pride don't want us to be the only nation blessed by God. We don't even want to be more blessed than other nations. We want to be blessed along with all the nations in the world.

We certainly don't feel we are more deserving of God's blessings. We are not a better people than the rest of the world. We can only do our best to live in harmony with the will of God and trust the grace and mercy of God when we fail, which we often do.

As Paul said, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

On this Independence Day, the celebration of the day we stood up straight and strong to say no to the arrogant and self-righteous who wanted to take away our self-respect, on this 4<sup>th</sup> of July let America say no to its own arrogance and self-righteousness and bow in humble thanksgiving before our God, who has blessed us in such great abundance throughout our history.

God bless America--and all the nations of the world.

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