

## **In God We Trust; More Than a Motto**

In a recent Time Magazine article Roy Blount, Jr. brought out a humorous yet provocative quote from Mark Twain: "Shortly after becoming President, (Theodore) Roosevelt made news by declaring, out of the blue, that 'In God We Trust' should be removed from U.S. coins because they 'carried the name of God into improper places.'" Twain responded, in conversation with Carnegie, that "In God We Trust" was a fine motto, "simple, direct, gracefully phrased; it always sounds well-- In God We Trust. I don't believe it would sound any better if it were true." That turn of the phrase stabs like a staccato into the heart of conscientious Christians who love our country and long for us to return to the roots of our heritage. As we begin a month of Sundays celebrating our Christian heritage and responsibility, my plead is, let's make "In God We Trust" more than a motto. Let's make it true!

God said to King Solomon, "*If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land*" (II Chronicles 7:13,14). The Lord was saying, if I have to bring judgment to the country because of a departure from Me and My ways, there is a way back. I wonder if this was what President George Washington was thinking when he said in his first inaugural address. "...we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained...." Let us move beyond the motto. Let us place, "In God We Trust" in our hearts.

**I. Let us trust God in time of war.** President Abraham Lincoln was one asked during the American Civil War, "Whose side is God on in this war?" His answer is a clarion call to our nation, "Sir, I am not concerned with whether or not God is on our side; I am concerned, are we on God's side."

Are we showing we are on God's side by our participation in church? Or do we look at church as optional? Let us not become like ancient Rome - so bent on having their spectator sports that they are willing to be entertained by the demise and even death of participants. Mark well, if we drop church for any and all secular activity, we are sending an apathetic message to our children that honoring God is not important. "*Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God...*" (Deuteronomy 5:11,12). God is pleased when we offer up one day out of seven to Him. America was founded upon individuals who, for the most part, were influenced by the Puritan mindset of the seventeenth century. Observe one of this eras most celebrated writers: "It hath been the constant practice of all Christ's Churches in the whole world ever since the days of the Apostles to this day, to assemble for public worship on the Lord's Day, as a day set apart thereto by the Apostles. Yea, so universal was this judgment and practice, that there is no one Church, no one writer, or one heretic that I remember to have read of, that can be proved even to have dissented or gainsaid it till of late times." (Richard Baxter on the *Divine Appointment of the Lord's Day*, 1680).

If I were to ask you when was America at her zenith in world influence and power, many would say at the ending of World War II. It is no mere coincidence that when America was at her zenith in world influence, she was also, according to one source, at her highest level of church attendance per capita.

**II. Let us trust God in time of peace.**

Alexis de Tocqueville from France, after observing America in the 1800's, said, "America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great." After the devastating blow America inflicted upon Japan to end the war, she did not say to Japan, "There, you got what you were deserving; you are on your own." No, not by any means. America sent one of her most gifted war lords, General Douglas McArthur and with the support of the American people, this general helped lead Japan into economic victory that has made Japan one of the most prosperous countries in the world. It is a Japanese company that now holds the number one place in automobile sales in, of all places, America. America has been good to Japan.

On an even grander scale than economic freedom, America has sent her missionaries around the world that have given greater spiritual freedom that even led to physical freedoms to children, women and peoples in bondage. "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance*" (Psalm 33:12). "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Proverbs 14:34).

### **III. Let us trust God in our churches.**

Years ago a friend of mine, Dr. Bill Stafford had just assumed a pastorate of a church. In one of the early deacon's meetings the pastor with great concern declared, "We shall no longer hold carnivals, bake sales and garage sales here at the church to meet our budget; we shall depend rather on our tithes and offerings." The deacons were visibly shaken as one of them commented, "We cannot meet budget if we don't do these things." When this was said, the pastor announced, "And that is why we are going to hold a series of prayer meetings to pray for God to help us." In a sigh, the chairman of the board of deacons said, "Oh Preacher! Has it come to this?" (I am not making this up). Has it come to this? A question that seems so out of place, yet so telling of where many a church is at this hour. How we need to portray to a lost world that God is real. If we handle our finances and church business just like the business world, I fear this is what many in the world will see in the church - just another business. But we are not just another business. Jesus proclaimed: "*...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18).

If God builds His church through us, it must be by His ways. It is so easy to fall back on human logic, even for ministry. We must always keep in mind the words of the Lord, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD*" (Isaiah 55:8). George MacDonald wrote, "In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably or succeed more miserably." What a contrast for many a church growth expert. McDonald is saying that succeeding without God is not only possible, but in the end will make you more miserable than noticeably failing without Him. We need to re-examine what Moses said when God promised His presence will go with them: "*And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence*" (Exodus 33:14,15). Moses was saying to the Lord, if You don't go with us, I don't want to go, yea, don't let me go! May God help us to pray this prayer.

### **IV. Let us trust God in our families.**

John Wooden, the eminently successful basketball coach at UCLA during its dynasty years, was asked his secret in producing stellar teams. His answer: "We master the basics. We drill over and over again on the fundamentals." I desire our church families to experience God's power in living the victorious Christian life. I believe our key will be to master the basics, i.e. be saved, be separated unto Christ and become students of the Word and prayer. Be encouraged to have regular family devotions, memorize Scripture and drill into our children faithfulness to the House of God. Dads and Moms, say with Joshua, "*...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:15). We make sure kids do their homework, practice their sports and musical instruments - why not make serving God

mandatory? The day will soon come when they are grown and you will not have this opportunity. Trust God in your family life and trust God with your families.

- Pastor Pope -

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