

## HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

It is a sad time for Dallas and the rest of America at this hour. It is also a good time to pause and reflect about where we are, where we were and where we are going as a person, church, family and nation. Last Sunday I spoke on the subject, "Keeping the Republic," inspired by Franklin's quote after the Constitutional Convention, "You have a republic, if you can keep it."

One of my favorite professors in college was Dr. John Stormer, author of *None Dare Call It Treason* written in 1964 and *Death of a Nation* written in 1968. In *Death of a Nation* Dr. Stormer asked the question "Why is America dying?" In his premise he said, "Daniel Webster foresaw the death walk which America is taking. He warned about it in a Fourth of July Speech in Concord, Massachusetts back in 1806. Webster stated: 'When we speak of preserving the Constitution, we mean not the paper on which it was written, but the spirit that dwells within it. Government may lose all of the real character, its genius, its temper without losing its appearance. Republicanism, unless you guard it, will creep out of its case of parchment like a snake out of its skin. You may have despotism under the name of a Republic. You may look on a government and see it possesses all the external modes of freedom, and yet finding nothing of the essence, the vitality of freedom in it; just as you may contemplate an embalmed body, where hath preserved proportion and form, amid nerves without action, and veins void of blood.'"

Moving further into the closing days of the Twentieth Century, Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer wrote *How Should We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. True to Schaeffer's presuppositional theology (i.e., the Christian faith is the only basis for rational thought) he said, "There is a flow to history and culture. This flow is rooted and has its wellspring in the thoughts of people. People are unique in the inner life of the mind—what they are in their thought-world determines how they act. This is true of their value systems and it is true of their creativity. It is true of their corporate actions, such as political decisions, and it is true of their personal lives. The results of their thought-world flow through their fingers or from their tongues into the external world. This is true of Michelangelo's chisel, and it is true of a dictator's sword. Should we despair and give in? If not how then should we then live?"

It is time (now more than ever) for a prophetic word from God. Let us therefore turn to one of God's most powerful prophets of all time, Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, chapter ten, the prophet is told by God to sound a trumpet of warning. If the people do not heed their warning, then their blood will be upon their own head. If the prophet fails to warn the people, their blood will be upon his head. Before Shaffer made his point, God was saying the same thing in words of inspiration in

586 BC: “Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:10,11). This is the question for America, the church and the family at this hour: “How should we then live?” In other words, “How can we survive?” And we need to realize God wants us to go beyond surviving; He wants us to thrive! God said that he took no pleasure in the death of people who insist on living wicked and apostate lives. I love the phrase God uses in Ezekiel 33:11a: “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD...” The Lord is saying, “As long as I live there is hope!”

My mind goes back to a conversation with one of my old mentors, now with the Lord, Dr. J. B. Buffington. He told me, “The church is the conscience of the community.” With that in mind, allow me to lift the trumpet to my mouth and speak with a Christian conscientiousness to our present situation.

### **1. Anarchy is not the answer.**

There are five basic forms of government. Monarchy is the rule by one, a monarch or dictator. Then there is an oligarchy, which is rule by an elite group. A democracy is rule by majority. A republic is rule by law, which protects the rights of all. Then, finally there is the anarchy, where there is no law. I fear that America, under the banner of democracy is morphing into anarchy. In the infancy stage of America, John Adams made this warning, “Democracy will soon degenerate into an anarchy; such an anarchy that every man will do what is right in his own eyes and no man's life or property or reputation or liberty will be secure, and every one of these will soon mould itself into a system of subordination of all the moral virtues and intellectual abilities, all the powers of wealth, beauty, wit, and science, to the wanton pleasures, the capricious will, and the execrable [abominable] cruelty of one or a very few.” Alex Jones said, “the difference between a democracy and a republic. is two wolves and a sheep voting on what’s for dinner.”

Under the laws of a republic, civil authority exists to protect not only the rights of the individual, but the individual himself or herself. Romans 13:3, 4: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” To attack this God-ordained form of protection is to attack the plan and method of God to keep not only law and order, but to preserve virtue in the land.

## **2. Applied forgiveness heals the wound.**

Peter said, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (I Peter 4:8). How is God’s love made fervent? The answer is “forgiveness.” How important is forgiveness? Jesus said in Matthew 6:14 and 15, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

I shall never forget pastoring an African-American man whose young brother died as a result of prejudicial negligence on the part of another young, but white young man. This man told his wife that his goal was to walk out his door armed with a rifle and a revolver and plenty of ammunition to keep his planned massacre going and in his own words, “kill every white man he could find.” On the very night this was planned, I came to his door. I did not realize until two years later that this precious man not only found forgiveness in his formerly hateful heart that night, but in the reality of knowing Christ in forgiveness of his sins he was empowered to forgive the young man who cost the life of his brother as well as the entire white population.

## **3. Anchor your soul.**

What a promise we have in Hebrews 6:19 and 20: “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” Deep sea fishermen will probably understand this principle quicker than the rest of us. When you are fishing in a huge body of water such as the Gulf of Mexico or Lake Michigan, it is vital that you have an anchor. The anchor attaches you to the steadfast rock bottom. Because the water has currents, without an anchor you will drift and turn. The rocks beneath the waves are not going anywhere. The two best times to catch fish is in the breaking daylight and descending darkness of the night. If you are fishing into the night, you will lose sight of the land. When it’s time to go in to the shore, you may end up going further in the ocean, unless you are anchored. We cannot depend on the ever-changing currents of our culture to lead us anywhere but further out to the stormy sea.

In I Peter 3:10 through 18 the apostle gives us a challenge. He begins by saying, “For he that will love life, and see good days...” (I Peter 3:10). Then he ends with an answer, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...” (I Peter 3:18a). And when we come to God, we are no longer ruled by unforgiveness on a personal basis, nor do we abdicate the rule of law on a national basis. How can we live like this? Because we are anchored to Jesus!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

