

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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The Declaration of Independence

When in the course of humas events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers on earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We present here the opening paragraph of the unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen States of America, on the 192nd birthday of our country. As a holiday, we too often forget the real reason for the celebration and look forward to the day as a time to enjoy the outdoors with picnics, fireworks, fishing, sprints, etc. Maybe a few veterans will recall, or the survivors of those who died to preserve our way of life will think of the causes of the celebration, but to be truthful we have a designated Memorial Day to honor our war dead and July 4th is our Independence Day.

The educational processes of our country are under constant pressure in regards to what and how they shape our young people. Especially is this true in regards to the recent show of a lack of patriotism in some instances among our armed services. What we are wondering is, is it possible to teach patriotism? It is possible to teach history, to demand respect, to inculcate ideals, but to actually teach love and patriotism seems an impossible task to impose on instructors. Better is it to teach history, to impress ideals and to create a love for our way of life and thereby to create a higher degree of patriotism.

It is interesting to note that the Supreme Court decision concerning prayer in the schools came just about a week before the celebration of Independence Day of 1964 and to note mention of God in the Declaration of Independence and in all documents of the government and the use of the Bible in most public functions. Many things have been said concerning the decision both in agreement and in disagreement. It is unnecessary to repeat them here except to say that while patriotism may not be a "taught" subject, religion is considered such. The United States established as a Christian nation offers freedom of, not from religion. And while the nation is established as Christian, it welcomes other religions and creeds and the Supreme Court has attempted to prevent the imposition of a religion on anyone not desiring it. It must be carefully stated that to pray, or not to pray, or what to pray is left to the local authorities.

Actual religious instruction has been eliminated from the curricula of public schools for some time and at the same time the opportunity for the teaching of moral maxims and principles which would be advantageous in the training of the young is eliminated. Recognizing this fact, many denominations have maintained private and parochial schools so that instruction in the particular faith of the group can be maintained and religion taught on a proper prospective with other subjects.

This year the 4th of July comes on Friday which preceds the first Sunday of the month at which time most churches celebrate communion and Christ with the symbols of bread and wine which represent the broken body and the blood of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

May we wish you a safe and happy Fourth and remember safety begins with you—on the highway, in the home or wherever and however you celebrate the holiday.



This Week's Sunday School Lesson.

5. THE BIBLE SPEAKS TO THE SOCIAL ORDER What Is Our Concern?

Frederick the Great of Prussia — a remarkably successful soldier, a powerful ruler, a reformer of sorts — was a good candidate for the title of enlightened despot. Part of his enlightenment came from the fact that he valued the advice of Francois Voltaire. In a letter to the king Voltaire wrote: "It seems clear to me that God designed us to live in society — just as He has given the bees the honey; and as our social system could not subsist without the sense of justice and injustice, He has given us the power to acquire that sense."

The sense of justice and injustice is strong in the Bible. It undergirds the law codes, stirs the prophets to vigorous word and deed, and inspires the poetry of the Psalter. In the New Testament the concerns of justice remain, but they are transmuted into the language of liberty and love. The interrelationship of love, justice, and freedom within the intention of God is the theme of this lesson. Before You Read the Scripture

Luke 4:16-18, 21. The scene in the synagogue in Nazareth sets the tone and outlines the program of Jesus' ministry. When Jesus had finished reading the Scripture passage (Isaiah 61:1-2), he astounded his hearers by declaring that it was being fulfilled in their presence.

"The acceptable year of the Lord" (verse 19) or, better, "The year of the Lord's favor" was the long-awaited time when the Messiah would come and usher in the kingdom of God.

The Messiah's work is to bring liberty. He sets free all those who are in any way captive — to suffering or poverty, physical or mental blindness, or oppression. He labors to correct every inequity and injustice that society inflicts on its weaker members or that men in error or self-will inflict upon themselves.

Isaiah 5:16, 18, 20-23. Chapter 5 begins with the lyric mood and beguiling softness of a love song. (Verse 1) The author used the metaphor of the vineyard to describe the care of a loving God for his people. (Verses 2-4a) Then, like lightning striking, he accused the people of willful rebellion against God. (Verse 4b) He then sang a series of dirges over the doomed nation, each beginning with the clang of the funeral bell: "Woe!"

he verses in this lesson come from two of the dirges. They set the character of God in sharp contrast with the behavior of Israel.

An object is holy because it is separated from everyday use and set apart for a sacred function. God's holiness is his separateness, his otherness from men, or his exaltedness above them, as expressed in verse 16a.

In the early days Israel saw God's holiness in his awesome power, always unpredictable and often destructive. Isaiah had a new idea of what separated God from men — his moral perfection. God shows

himself to be holy by his justice and righteousness. (Verse 16)

God's Perfection — Our Imperfection

The Hebrew word for moral perfection is translated as "righteousness." It signifies complete rightness. The "rightness" of God is best seen in his justice.

The metaphor in verse 18 is difficult to interpret. "Iniquity" and "sin" can mean not only evil attitudes and actions but also their consequences to the one who does them. The second sense is probably intended here. The verse might then be paraphrased, "How miserable are those whose falsehood drags the results of iniquity toward them as with a rope, the destructive consequences of their sin, as if with an ox's leather harness."

Verses 20-23 detail the evils that had developed in Israel. "Heroes" and "valiant men" (verse 22) are military terms, usually used of men who have won fame on the battlefield. Isaiah's ironic comparison still carries its bite.

Hebrew law required the testimony of only two or three witnesses for conviction. (Deuteronomy 17:6) It was relatively easy to win a case by bribery if either the judge or the witnesses were corruptible, and this weakness of the legal system was ruthlessly exploited by the wealthy. Society cannot survive if its laws are held in contempt. Therefore, the prophets bitterly denounced bribery in the law courts as a typical example of social injustice.

What the Scripture Says

The Scripture for today is Isaiah 5:16-25; Hosea 12:6-9; Luke 4:16-21; James 2:1-9. Selected verses are printed below. See Home Bible Study suggestions in the back of the quarterly. Luke 4:16-18, 21

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; 17 and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

21 And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Isaiah 5:16, 18, 20-23

16 But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.

18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes.

20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light

and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

22 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink,

23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!

Memory election: Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

—Amos 5:24

How We Understand The Scripture

Justice is a quality both of God and of his people when their society is sound and healthy.

As a divine attribute, justice is closely related to the creative power of God. As God had a plan for the universe, he has also a design for human society. It too ought to function in harmony and order, fulfilling his purpose. The power that God brings to bear in history to create this concord and unity is his justice. Divine justice is God's creativity at work in history.

What Is Sin?

This conclusion leads to what might be called a social definition of sin. Sin is anything that hinders the realization of God's justice in society. Any social movement or practice that distorts God's design or disrupts its ordered expression is by definition sinful.

The nature of sin in society is clear in Isaiah 5:20. The prophet pictures a community in which all the values are turned upside down. What God calls good, Israel denounces as evil. What he calls darkness, they regard as light. Where values are wantonly and totally reversed, the order of society falls apart; and chaos and strife follow.

The problem of human justice is the problem of the use and abuse of power. Whenever men think of their power as their own to use as they will, they introduce the cancer of injustice into society.

Oppression of the weak is an abuse of power, and crooked dealing in the law courts is a glaring example of such oppression. (Verse 23) But the spirit of injustice works in less obvious ways. The man who fails to recognize his own fallibility is a dangerous neighbor. He feels it is impossible for him to be in the wrong. Therefore, blame and reprisal must fall on those stupid and inferior "others" who cause all the trouble. (Verse 21)

God's Design

As surely as a cart follows the animals to which it is harnessed, injustice pulls after it a train of evil consequences. (Verse 18) These can be checked short of the ruin of society only if the abuse of power ceases and the forces of society are brought to the service of God's design.

As we saw in the lesson for June 22, personal obedience to the divine will is possible only

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